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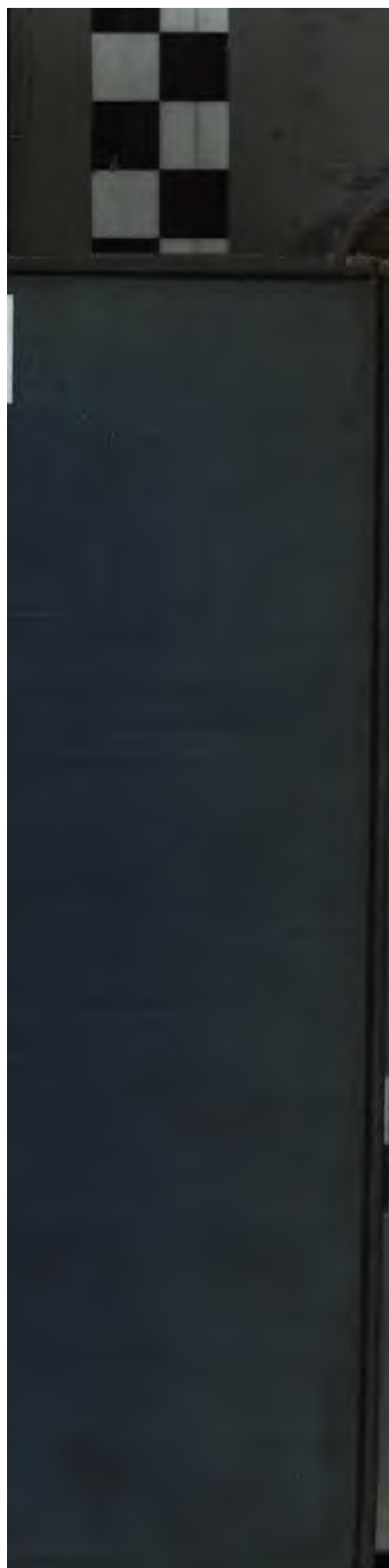
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CHILDREN OF PASSAGE

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BY
FREDERICK WATSON

Author of "Shallows"

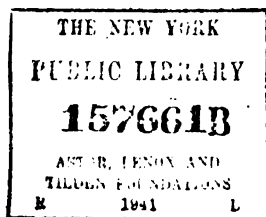


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TO MY MOTHER
IN MEMORY OF OTHER DAYS

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CHILDREN OF PASSAGE

CHAPTER I

MRS. MANNING AT HOME

I

MRS. MANNING watched, with a fine sense of his efficiency, Small, the butler, pass noiselessly across the drawing-room carpet. The way he tempered the blinds so that not a ray of the afternoon sun should smite her, was quite affecting. He came and he went but always bore the soul of harmony with him, and never omitted to leave a deeper peace in his train. Mrs. Manning was soothed by Small. He was more than a butler—he was a treatment. There were moments when she could have purred with happiness as Small moved gently, benevolently, around her, intercepting or forestalling draughts, wasps, unwelcome visitors, anticipating with anxious eyes, a shower; including in the luncheon basket some little trifle peculiar to the occasion. In their London house—how greatly lost to her only Small knew—he was the spirit of Town; were she a little fatigued, or her nerves on edge, who could announce the Vicar, dear understanding Mr. Willoughby (whose brother was heir to the Cracklethorp peerage) with such delicacy, concord, and restraint. And upon those critical mornings when even Mr. Willoughby carried no message it was Small who ushered Dr. Bennett up the stairs, Small who discussed her case with reverence and hope, Small again who despatched the prescription to the chemist.

Mrs. Manning looked out of the window and shivered mentally. The afternoon was settling down for a steady night of rain, which, so the "Scotsman" averred, would be of the greatest possible benefit to the crops. There were banks of low hanging clouds over the rolling moorland, and towards the north, where the slopes of Lower Calder loomed darkly, the mist was creeping towards the valley. Inside and out brooded an absolute stillness that appalled Mrs. Manning. It frightened her. Small, halting for a moment at the window, raised stricken Mayfair eyes, and pursed his thin lips. He had done what he could with cushions, flowers, oddments, but he was not up to this.

The enormous black clock chimed and struck four melancholy notes. It struck with a grievance. To Mrs. Manning, deeply resentful of the interruption it seemed that even clocks were charged with the querulous national spirit.

"How long have we been here, Small?"

Mrs. Manning knew perfectly well. It was a counter-fuge to impress him with her deepening despair.

"Nearly three weeks, Madam. It seems longer, does it not?"

"Are the Highlands always like this, Small?"

He looked down upon the daffodils, so charmingly afloat in a bowl forwarded from Grosvenor Square.

"*Always*, Madam. In winter the rain comes down in snow, but it is the same, Madam, is it not—the same only different?"

"There's something so depressing about Ardmore," ventured Mrs. Manning.

"Lies low, Madam, at the foot of the mountains. Vaporous. Old place they say——"

"Did you see the owner, Small?"

"No, Madam—oh no. Owner died in Stuart bedroom. Just the same they say for centuries. All died there. Curious, Madam, old customs."

Mrs. Manning lifted dismayed and reproachful eyes.

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"Really, Small, you know how nervous I am. I think you might be more considerate."

"Pardon, Madam—I——"

"That is Miss Applegarth's room, I think."

"It is, Madam. Looks out upon the lake."

"Has the motor gone to the station?"

"It should be back any moment."

"Then bring tea as soon as Miss Applegarth arrives. And, Small——"

"Madam?"

"Kindly keep your mind off depressing things. How often have I warned you how liable we are to impressions—*mental impressions*."

"I spoke in jest, Madam."

"You spoke as though there were a ghost, Small. Is there supposed to be—to be any story——"

Small gave her a quick look. In the distance the bell sounded from the hall.

"The motor, Madam," he said, and went in his smooth admirable fashion from the room.

II

Miss Applegarth was full of excitement about the house. She was one of those splendid and wholesome creatures who irradiate boisterous health and animation. She had travelled all night and broken her journey at Edinburgh, she had changed trains, and driven over the roads to Ardmore, but her nerves were in perfect normality, her appetite keen, her curiosity unflagging.

"At last, Eleanor," said Mrs. Manning; "it seems ages since I saw you. Tell me—did you have a comfortable journey?" . . .

"And now," gasped Miss Applegarth, having related with spasmodic gusts of laughter the humours of her expedition north, "tell me all the news. Your telegram gave me quite a turn. I thought you must be ill."



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Mrs. Manning raised her expressionless eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said at last, "I don't know how to explain. But when a fortnight had passed and Francis was still delayed in London I wired—I had to. I've never spent such a horrible two weeks in my life. This house is awful. What would you do here alone, Eleanor? What could anyone do? It's enough to send one mad. The intolerable silence, no living soul to be seen, the ceaseless rain. Only this afternoon I asked Small whether he felt queer here. He would not admit anything, but I could see he *knows*, Eleanor."

"Knows what?" asked Miss Applegarth in a sepulchral whisper.

Mrs. Manning cast her a mournful glance and shook her head. Her very reticence compelled Miss Applegarth to believe the worst.

"I am not strong enough for old houses," she pursued restively, "and to make matters worse the doctor is most stupid and unsympathetic. Dr. MacKechnie—that's his real name—is very trying. I was warned by Small that he wears leggings round his trousers, but he roars, my dear, and thumps, and belittles symptoms, tramps over them. Small was scandalised. After all, what are symptoms if they are not danger signals?"

"Pain," broke in Miss Applegarth crisply, "is Nature's warning."

"Only last evening," continued Mrs. Manning who was never known to listen to generalities, "only last evening I detected a faint throb in my side—like tick-tack—just here. After dinner. Small, poor fellow, was so upset he could not do enough. I knew when he brought me three water bags, one for my feet, one for my chest, and one other, what he was thinking of——"

Miss Applegarth was fascinated.

"What, dear Millicent?"

"Of his mother; he thought I'd forgotten but I hadn't. Just before she died—please ring for early tea, dear—



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just before the poor woman died she had a beetle, isn't it the death-beetle makes a noise. Anyway Small was all on edge. Then the ghost of himself. I don't say it attacked, but it was a symptom."

"I should think so," responded Miss Applegarth warmly. "And what did Doctor—Doctor——"

"MacKechnie, dear, he came but he ruffled me. Small saw it at once. Of course you know how one gets silly ideas, but he seemed to be actually inclined to laugh me out of myself. As though I were a child having gas or something. Last year I was compelled to give up Dr. Smithers for that very reason, and I have decided when I return to town to give this wonderful Mr. Bellamy—Bellow I think his name is—a trial——"

"I don't think I——"

"He is *wonderful*—quite marvellous. Mrs. Winterheim went to him for insomnia, and her husband for obesity—isn't that the word? They both swear by him. Of course he is not actually a qualified doctor, and he advertises, but if he cures, what *does* professional etiquette matter?"

Miss Applegarth biting the air with her enormous teeth signified by a single gesture that one must not be too punctilious.

"What does he specialise in, Millicent?"

"Everything—everything. It is his theory that all diseases are—I forget the term—and that they will respond. But here is his little pamphlet. He never operates, never examines, just sits and concentrates mind waves."

At that moment Small entered, accompanied by Grant, the footman, and proceeded with the ritual for tea. Mrs. Manning instantly became speechless. Like religion, illness she regarded as a subject too sacred for the under servants. Small with soundless precision placed the table beside her, the electric kettle upon its brass

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and, the muffins and potato cakes with little braisiers to keep them piping hot, the tomato and cucumber sandwiches, the flakes of bread and butter, cut in tiny squares, shortbread, and the French pastries, the almond and the cherry cake—there was a way to arrange even a trifling snack like that, and likewise a way of spoiling the whole business.

"And how," said Miss Applegarth, "is David?"

"He comes up next week—he is just leaving Cambridge now, or don't you say 'coming down.' I never understand these things. And Francis is bringing some friends up the same day."

"That will be nice for you, dear."

Mrs. Manning was uncertain. She spoke with faint irritation.

"Francis has no *real* friends," she said, "only people engaged in business. I suppose they talk things over. Victor Hepburn is coming and a Mr. Speed, an editor——"

"Hepburn—Hepburn," repeated Miss Applegarth.

"He *writes*, dear, *writes*. Don't ask me what because I never know the titles or authors of books and I never finish them. But Small is getting the names of some. I think it must be dreadful to be an author and find nobody's ever heard of you—tragic or would it make you callous?"

"Didn't he write 'The Houseboat'?" broke in Miss Applegarth, and instantly filling her mouth with sandwich added in a far-off muffled bass, "or was that Henry Mulberry?"

"My dear Eleanor, don't please; but it sounds like a Mulberry, not that I've ever heard of him. Yes, Small, what is it?"

"A landaulette, Madam, is coming up the drive. Are you at home?"

Mrs. Manning turned to Miss Applegarth.

"Are we, Eleanor? Can you bear it, or would you *not* prefer to lie down?"

Miss Applegarth, whose interest in humanity was almost an embarrassment, protested that wild horses would not drag her from the room.

"I do hope they won't be very Scotch," murmured Mrs. Manning with genuine alarm. "So breezy and anxious to prove things."

"Mrs. and Miss Ewing-Dunn," announced Small, and the room was instantly charged as it were to overflowing with Ewing-Dunns. They advanced heartily upon Mrs. Manning, feared loudly that they had hardly given her breathing space, overwhelmed Miss Applegarth and conversed singly and together in high pronounced voices with intermittent sprays of laughter.

"And how," asked Mrs. Ewing-Dunn, "do you like the place?"—then with celerity—"Of course we know every inch of it, and Rachel there wants us to give up our house in Glasgow."

"Our place marches with Ardmore," Rachel was shouting to Miss Applegarth, "and so we naturally take a great interest in new-comers."

"There are so many really nice people about," from Mrs. Ewing-Dunn, "and we'll send round the Fiery Cross," at which she laughed much to Mrs. Manning's consternation. "We'll summon the clans" (both ladies united in showers of merriment), "there are the Findlays (confidentially) big biscuit people, you know, and the Douglas-Peters, such jolly neighbours (confidentially) big chemists in Edinburgh, you know——"

"There's always so much going on," screamed Rachel, biting a piece of cherry cake, "plenty of dinners and dances, and soon you'll all be in the swim. Dad's altered Craigdune no end. Why, when we came it belonged to a stuffy old family called MacKay. And the dirt! Been there *centuries*."

"No mistaking *that*," thrust in Mrs. Ewing-Dunn across the intervening space as a female eagle might hail its young.

"Everything in rack and ruin," went on Rachel



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briskly, "cottages broken down, people not looked after——"

"Yet they wouldn't leave until Geoffrey compelled them," contributed her mother with a shrug of her shoulders—"the independence of peasantry, oh dear——"

"Kindest thing to do," went on Rachel. "Better abroad, aren't they? No future here." Then after some rumination, "Made a ripping deer forest of it all."

"You like it?" enquired Miss Applegarth feebly.

"*Love* it—*dote* on it. The loneliness. Dad's made it like somewhere out of the world. So peaceful——"

"My husband," Mrs. Ewing-Dunn was saying since she felt such things were better treated by those who understood them, "is in business. He is here a great deal, of course, loves his gun and rod—all that—but he simply must work off his energy. I laugh at him sometimes, don't I, Rachel?"

Her daughter nodded quickly.

"Dad's in whisky, Mrs. Manning," she said, "and mother and I tell him he went and did it to disgrace us." At which the room resounded with a storm of Ewing-Dunn laughter sufficient to sweep away any further feeling, or snobbishness upon the matter. Instantly Miss Applegarth recalled with vivid imagery a poster which if she had seen once she had seen a hundred times that very morning, "Here's tae ye—tak' it neat," and a gentleman in a kilt winking over "Dunn's Double Diamond."

"The prettiest glen about here is Inverclover," resumed Rachel, the financial basis of Craigdune thus satisfactorily faced and overcome, "it lies up there through the pass of Gartleg."

"And who lives there?" enquired Miss Applegarth politely.

A smile crossed the ruddy face of Miss Ewing-Dunn. Her mother, who possessed the gift of speaking at the

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top of her voice and gathering up or thrusting in upon conversations all over the room, turned her diminutive grey eyes and made a grimace.

"Tell—Rachel," she said, and leaned forward a little as it were to hold back the traffic.

"In Inverclover," said Rachel with the portentous air of a conjurer leading up to his best trick, "there is a stronghold——"

"A country of the blind," broke in Mrs. Ewing-Dunn delightedly.

"Be quiet, mother, I'm telling it. There is a funny old man called Grahame, and he lives in a broken-down house called Garroch. And he's always lived there—*always*."

"And tell about the Miss Macdougalls, Rachel."

"Give me time. With him live two old dames who never go out, never call, and are never called upon."

"Is this Mr. Grahame unmarried then?"

"Widower, and Dr. MacKechnie once told me that when his first wife died he married again, and when she died he commandeered his first wife's sisters. It's jolly confusing, but really is quite proper if you work it out. They arrived and took in charge the only child——"

Miss Applegarth, who was of that great company who cannot hear enough of domestic detail even when it affects complete strangers, nodded encouragingly. She could see it all—the distracted father, the solitary little one, and two dear old ladies arriving in an old-fashioned conveyance with their boxes on top.

"A girl called Iona," Rachel was saying, her small green eyes flickering at her mother.

"Iona," screamed Mrs. Ewing-Dunn, taking her cue, "like a cathedral."

"Hush, mother—it isn't her fault. And in the village is a minister—John Parish—not young nor charming——"

"How can you, Rachel?" broke in Mrs. Ewing-



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Dunn, casting delighted glances at Mrs. Manning and Miss Applegarth.

"But deeply in love with this Iona. And they say—they say—she doesn't know it, and is far removed above that sort of thing. Isn't that a sad little story, Miss Applegarth? Like a novel."

"Like a *tract*," tittered Mrs. Ewing-Dunn.

"And you don't know them?"

It was a searching question but they met and finessed it with the surprising daring of their type.

"Oh dear no—we are not nearly good enough. Dad calls Inverclover the stronghold——"

"Of what?" asked Miss Applegarth deeply curious.

"I don't know—of the past I suppose. He would give a lot to buy up the Garroch property——"

"Nonsense, Rachel," said her mother.

"But he would—he told me so. Just run up there in your car, Mrs. Manning. It's worth it."

"This Mr. Parish," pursued Miss Applegarth, "is he our minister?"

"I suppose so. But he won't bother you. Dad says living alone in a Manse with nothing to do would finish anyone, but being married with a dozen children isn't much better, is it?"

"Rachel," expostulated her mother.

"Talk to him about his chickens," she added, "you'll draw a blank at anything else."

"And now tell me," swept on Mrs. Ewing-Dunn, returning to business, "when can our hubbies have a day's fishing together?"

Mrs. Manning gathered her straying thoughts.

"Francis comes here next week," she replied, "he is bringing one or two friends. And my son David——"

"Have you only one boy?"

"Only one."

"And no girls?"

"None."



Mrs. Manning at Home II

Mrs. Ewing-Dunn clucked her tongue at such a state of affairs.

"I have four boys," she said, "and two girls. How old is your boy?"

"Just twenty-one."

"Rachel is just eighteen," remarked Mrs. Ewing-Dunn and appeared to turn this surprising locality of ages over in her mind.

At that moment the clock beat out its menacing notes, and scrambling to their feet the visitors rushed together at Mrs. Manning, broke off protesting that they must not under any circumstances cross hands, launched their farewells at Miss Applegarth, instantly assuring her that it was really only *au revoir*, and thundered into the hall.

A moment of silence and the horn of their magnificent car was heard carolling around every bend in the drive. Suddenly it was borne in on Mrs. Manning that solitude had once again descended on Ardmore.

"I think, Eleanor," she murmured, leaning back, "I am in for one of my heart attacks."

"My dear," expostulated Miss Applegarth floundering on the carpet beside her.

III

It was after nine o'clock and below stairs Small rose from the table and, taking his glass of beer over to the fire, made room for Mrs. Saunders the cook-house-keeper, and Grant the footman. It was the moment of the day when Small unveiled his soul. During the earlier hours he was the super-butler—in the relaxation of the underworld he laid aside his armour and was as other men.

"Mind you," he remarked judiciously, "I've no word against the 'Ighlands—no, Mrs. Saunders. The 'Ighlands in the season is **THE THING** and don't I know it."

"With the Seacombs," interposed Mrs. Saunders,



whose mind was unceasingly distracted by absolute uncertainty whether the butler was a married man or not.

"No," he replied with an eye on the footman, "the Seacombs never rented a shooting except in Norfolk. Splendid place I will admit—ten miles from Sandringham—best people—forty bedrooms."

"When I was with Lord Spinks," began the footman, fully aware that he took a liberty.

"Ho—the law lord," sniffed Small, "better keep clear of that lot, me lad. No, Mrs. Saunders, it was with the Todmarshes, very old family. Leicestershire. We always went north end of July and never came south till the beginning of November. Point is this—the 'Ighlands are out of bounds just now. Result—Ewing-Dunns——"

"Who are they, Mr. Small?" asked the footman with humility and the air of a man who had thrust aside for ever the Spinkses of this world.

"*What* are they?" burst in Small with rhetorical scorn. "*Whisky*. Their chauffeur told me they weren't any class. Said there is no class hereabouts, not real old crusted." He broke off and screwed up his eyes.

"'Alf a mo, though, yes he did, he said if you want blood see Grahame of somewhere near; said we'd better go to 'im as 'e'd never come to us. Didn't know what the game 'ere was. No more than the missus upstairs."

Mrs. Saunders breathed heavily. Small had never ventured on such delicate ground before. He was always reluctant, and stand-offish, with a piece of real gossip.

"Doesn't know wot?" she panted.

The butler took a cheerful draught of beer, and relit his pipe. The moment had come.

"Francis," he said deliberately, speaking with kindly intimacy of his employer, "Francis plays a long game. Bless you, I've watched him for years. Don't think



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I'd hang about second-class people for fun, nor you neither, Mrs. Saunders."

Again in a painful silence he attended to his pipe.

"Francis," he repeated as though the name gave him a relish, "is aiming 'igh and will aim 'igher. When you 'eard of this little trip north p'rhaps you thought it was for sport or society——"

The footman frowned darkly as though unprepared to state definitely what he thought.

"Not a bit of it. Francis doesn't care a damn, if you'll pardon the expression, mam, for knockin' about. 'E's all on, 'e is. I'd back Francis against anybody's money—*all the time*."

His audience was stirred enormously.

"This place, Mrs. Saunders, is a dee-coy—it's a *status quo*, as they say; it's a point o' varntage. When I tell you that Sir Price Pringle is a-coming 'ere, perhaps you'll smell a rat. In Parliament 'e is, in touch with the Party 'e is, does little roundabout business visits. All on the square—money on the table. Who'll bid? Knighthoods £10,000, Barts £25,000, and Peerages goin' for a song—comprennee?"

Mrs. Saunders gaped at such acumen. The gleam of social prestige flamed like a beacon in the eye of Grant the footman.

"There's more than that afoot, but *there's* a game to be sure. Sir Francis Manning, Bart., the great financier——"

"What's that to do with this house, Mr. Small?"

"This, my lad. Francis won't stop at a baronetcy. 'E's out for trouble 'e is, and when 'e's founded a nice little castle on some bloomin' 'ill then 'elp for Baron Ardmore or Baron Inverclover, or——" he broke off listening keenly. "I thought I 'eard the bell," he murmured; "that Applegarth takes 'ot milk at ten."

In the pause the stricken circle gaped at the complacent figure of the butler as innocent natives might await an imminent revelation by their god.



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And Small, deeply knowing, puffed his pipe and having toasted his legs rose majestically and warmed his back.

"So it seems ter me," he said very aloof.

"And the missus doesn't know," repeated Mrs. Saunders, wagging her head, "think of that now. D'you know I'm sorry for that woman. Got something on 'er mind. Says the 'ouse is 'aunted."

"Speakin' as one who knows," remarked Small impressively, "she 'asn't a mind, and the place ain't 'aunted."

"Strikes me," commented Mrs. Saunders heavily, "it's 'er mind's 'aunted—not the 'ouse."

The butler started and reflected deeply.

"Uncommon smart that," he said—"uncommon smart. True too. Don't think you realise quite what you've said, Mrs. Saunders. Drat," he added hurriedly, "there's Applegarth's milk."



CHAPTER II

JOHN PARISH

I

EVEN in days when one might suspect a conspiracy against any kind of permanence, Time touched Inverclover with reluctance. For centuries, and all through the tragic history of the Gael, a spell of remote inviolability has dwelt beneath the prolonged shadows of Ben Calder, whose rugged flanks rise from the patched and huddled crofts of the village like formidable ramparts against the southern world. Beyond those sombre reaches of pine and shattered rock the snow glistens upon an April morning, and the Clover river rushes ice cold through the pass of Gartleg. Long ago when other people's cattle arrived breathless from the south, and were shepherded into the upper reaches of the valley, solitude so majestic as to alarm the tourist of to-day held more than poetic significance, and the imperishable truth that there was but one road into Inverclover, and that by a mere cleft in the rock of Gartleg, encouraged the marauders to rejoice in the forethought of Providence and the delectable savour of roasting meat. Such pleasant jaunts, mere commonplaces of the early eighteenth century, gathered about them in course of time and set against the background of Victorian Sabbatarianism, a pensive and glamorous interest, as moss fragile, but tenacious, clings to a rough and common stone. From the twilight of the eighteenth century, old folk recalling out of their extreme youth echoes of a bustling clachan, and the



din of a piper at sundown, set grandchildren dreaming, and staring with a new impatience at the empty village street, and the churches two in number, one of them economically made of tin. The old times had passed like mist at break of day and the folk had followed them. Only Ben Calder, serene and changeless, watched the night meet the dawn upon its summit, while the years, like the storied robbers of children, snatched by death or the road to the Clyde, the very aged or else the very young.

The Manse had its own little store of historical associations, but John Parish cared little enough for such things. There was a room where Sir Walter had written a chapter of Rob Roy (being overtaken by a fall of snow), there was a tale of a Jacobite trapped in the great kitchen chimney by the crude lighting of a fire below him, there was beyond denial the mournful story of the Reverend Julius Johnson, who, in the early nineteenth century, being a southerner and hated in Inverclover, sat for days on end staring like a crazed man at the forelorn stretches of black moorland, seeing in it after a while the spirit of evil, sleepless, menacing, biding its hour. All day he watched it and dared it, and pleaded with a white face from his upper window when with the falling twilight it seemed to creep onwards over the Manse wall, up the avenue, into the hall. Soon enough it went the rounds that Mr. Johnson was drinking, as well he might, and one day, a day of hard frost and a mist that hung drearily enough to the rooms of the Manse as though for some fell purpose, or as a witness to some horrid transaction, they found the minister hanging from a rafter in the study, the floor strewn with food and bottles, as though he had withstood a siege until the bursting of the door. John Parish had heard the story, but it caused him no uneasiness. It was all so very long ago. . . .

All through the night the Clover River travelled its

tortuous course, from the head of the glen where it slid smoothly through the sodden marshland haunted by wildfowl, through the darkness of Gartleg Woods, along the fringe of the glebe land, and so down to Clover where the waters meet. But what grieved John Parish, and therefore should have grieved the running water (since it lapped a goodly space of glebe-land), was the sordid thing that happened in the dark. At the turn of the night (or so one can vision it) when the greyness of dawn was faltering in the east strange things happen in Inverclover. The Manse, out-posted on the broken trail to Upper Clover, stands dim white, like a spectre alone in a huddle of trees. Before the closed door and vacant window-panes, rabbits flit noiselessly across the lawn, and, over the broken barn, an owl is betrayed for an instant by the ashen skyline. Through the Fairy Knowe, where the little people dance upon a timeless glade, the deer are hurrying with the mist, heading for Calder and the breaking dawn.

And yet sometime between the moonlight and the rise of sun, a large dog fox (they saw his pads upon the sandy brink of the river) sneaking across the Manse drive, crouching beneath a blighted rhododendron, came with the night and passed with the night, tossing his booty over his shoulder.

It was an additional misfortune that the discovery of this dark and sinister affair fell to James, the minister's man, who suffered calamities gladly. About the hour of seven, James crossed the Clover bridge and ascended the hill to the Manse. In his mind were no thoughts whatever. His fine pronounced profile, his great Highland nose, the clenched mouth and guarded eye (guarded by an eyebrow like a moustache)—all these insignia of a rugged soul entranced the occasional English visitor. People were very grateful to James. He was like an illustration or a landscape of a scene everybody ought to know. He saved trouble.

Being a man averse to concentrated or intensive



labour and prone to periods of abysmal gloom, accompanied by symptoms of awful collapse, James might, as a skilled gardener, groom, or man-servant, have ultimately or even repeatedly suffered the buffets of misfortune and dismissal. Happily, like the minister, he had nothing particular to do. Both were so busied about many things. He was, in short, of that aloof class, unstoried in romance, unsung in poetry, the minister's man. And yet what loveliness might not have made sweet and heartened the life of James. His toil was all amongst the flowers, the homely vegetable, the stable, and the glebe. He was provided by inheritance with a sound and thrifty stomach. His was an honourable post. And there was more in it than these fortunate things. Reared an orphan, spurning contemptuously the claims of matrimony he was as Melchisedek, and envied throughout the countryside. It was indeed a melancholy reflection that he, who might have become the central figure of a story such as the Empire would have read with streaming eyes, preferred, instead, to rob the sweetest May morning of its promise, and, being very clumsy with the hoe, level the smiling summer flowers. . . .

Hardly was the dog fox receiving the frenzied congratulations of his brood upon Ben Calder when James reached the Manse gate, and trudged up the great avenue of trees, which long ago had watched the raiders hasting under the autumn moon. After that silence, and James bending over something white upon the grass scarcely able to credit the goodness of Providence. The scene on the lawn where feathers lay like driven snow nerved him to an extraordinary activity. With the feet of one carrying glad tidings upon the mountains, he broke into a crazy trot and, bending for a handful of gravel, sprayed with a brave clatter the bedroom window of John Parish.

"Meenister—oot o' yir bed—yir hens are deid by the score—the brae's a' white wi' corpses."

From a cheerful dream, John Parish awoke to the facts of life, and the idleness of remaining in bed while massacre stalked through the land and James was its happy trumpeter.

II

"Two pullets," said John Parish in a melancholy voice, "a wyandotte and a leghorn——"

"It was bound to be," commented James and shook his head at a dozen chickens wandering over the neglected lawn. Here and there stood a coop upon grass that was once trim and smooth as a carpet. Under the draggled bushes that had flowered in past days, fowls scratched and burrowed, emerging speckled with brown soil. Over all the garden the ravages of poultry, the inroads of rabbits, the expeditions of moles, and the reclaiming hand of Nature, fought over the belated spoils of beauty, achieving not a wilderness but only a desolation.

John Parish reflected upon the words.

"It was verra different in auld Dr. Crum's day," pursued the gardener relentlessly. "I mind yon bush where the cockerel is gaein' a dicht tae his doup a picture—a pairfect picture——"

"It isn't now," commented John Parish with dreary levity.

James expectorated moodily. He was not to be led astray by the jocose.

"An' I've heard ma faither say that in the ministry o' auld Maister Dalrymple the flower beds were a sicht. But there, what could ye expect——"

"Why——"?

"Ech, I canna tell ye what's evident to a bairn. The auld Manse is no what it was. Mind ye, Maister Parish, I'm no blamin' ye—I ken finely how ye're placed. I'm no a married man mysel', but I understand—I'm no bigoted about women, only clear-headed——"

The minister met the bleak scrutiny of James for a moment in silence, then with rising perturbation turned and stared deliberately at the Manse. It was probably the first time he had ever given it serious attention. He was familiar enough with its seasoned grey stone partially covered by an overgrown creeper. Several of the windows he noticed were cracked, or broken, and all cried aloud to heaven for cleaning inside and out. In the dining-room a green blind, that was invented to temper the sunlight but not retard the air, had stuck about half-way down the sash, one side very tight and compressed and the other hanging outstretched like the broken pinion of a swan. The upper part of the window also was wedged about a foot from the top, so that upon a winter's night the passage of icy wind flapped the shattered blind, and whistled dismally across the room. But John Parish was strong and sturdy and absolutely indifferent to such things. The changes of the weather, the moods of the far-flung landscape drew from him no answering elation or sorrow; there was something abnormal in his detachment from the tyranny that rides imaginative men. He lived in perpetual discomfort, sitting in a draught upon a hapless chair and before an empty grate, taking cold meals without a care, shaving in frozen water, and spending year after year in a house in which decay had set its mark in the stains upon the ceilings and the layers of hoarded dust upon the floors. The drawing-room was furnished with a few cheap chairs, a small piano, and a large mirror that had never been hung and lay against the wall. During the autumn he had collected apples from his orchard and laid them on the faded carpet, taking no further thought for them. The room where they had withered and decayed held still a faint tainted fragrance. . . .

Something of all this impressed him as vital.

"It looks rather—rather down at heels," he admitted. "Is that what ye mean?"

The gardener cast the Manse a glance laden with contempt.

"A' weel," he said, "what's what canna be mended by words o' mine. I merely say it's a sair come-down frae auld Dr. Crum, but then he was three times married, and what's it matter in the end? Meenisters come, grow old, and are buried. They come and they go, an' ane meenister's no carin' for what anither meenister's set upon. We're all gettin' on in years ony road——"

Encouraged by the inevitable termination to all earthly pilgrimage, he snuffled briskly and took a step or two away.

But something in his words stung John Parish.

"James," said he, "I'm forty to-day—that's not old. There's time enough to take all this in hand, eh——?"

The gardener pondered, and it was as though destiny were choosing his words.

"It's no age that signifies, Maister Parish," he said deliberately, "it's temperament, just temperament. Me and you, ye mind, are settled. I can give ye twenty year, for, as I tell ye, I worked wi' Doctor Crum long before the burial o' his second wife. But we're baith bachelors and no like to change oor estate——"

John Parish uttered a rueful laugh, but said nothing. For an instant the gardener's keen eyes watched him, searching his mind, then without a word he shambled up the path, opened the gate leading to the kitchen garden, and went tediously out of sight.

For long the minister stared upon the weed-scattered drive, then once again he raised his head and looked intently at the neglected frontage of the Manse.

III

"Mrs. G
re w

led John Parish from his study.
but someone paused outside in

the hall and then drew nearer, the dismal clip clop of a shoe immensely big coming to a halt before the door. He crossed the floor quickly and turned the handle. Upon the mat stood Mrs. Grant, the housekeeper, whose vision of life was almost Oriental in its passivity.

It was ten years since she had applied for the post, and John Parish had been greatly impressed by her appearance, and the fact that she was a widow, and came not from the district but was a native of Carlisle. He had never seen a cook wear gaiters before, nor a check skirt, nor carry so fine an air of quiet if oppressed distinction. When she spoke it was in a tone of excessive fatigue, punctuated by muffled yawns, but he had made light of this believing she was tired from travelling. He therefore hastened to engage her, and about a week later Mrs. Grant arrived and remained. Whatever the late Mr. Grant had thought of her cooking, or whether there was ever a Mr. Grant at all, John Parish would not have liked to enquire. For a time he wished she would see her way to fastening her blouse more adequately, or procuring a pair of slippers that matched instead of one black shoe fastened to the foot by elastic and one that waved when she walked. Her hair too was a surprise to him. But her manner remained the same, profoundly dejected and inert, except when rousing herself by an immense effort she would remark that the front steps were very awkward to wash, or the coals very heavy to carry, or contribute some other reflection affecting imminent changes in domestic routine. Until John Parish dreaded only one thing—that the dinner, such as it was, would become too arduous to cook.

Mrs. Grant stared dully at him with her flaccid eyes. She appeared to have crushed all emotion, whether of hope or absolute despair at an early age, leaving only the animate shell to perform simple evolutions. She was so like a deaf person that John Parish invariably

raised his voice when addressing her, just as townfolk shout laboriously at all rustics over sixty.

It was eleven o'clock and Saturday morning. He must be brief so that he could make a start on his sermon, which in the vicious habit of sermons was still unwritten.

"Mrs. Grant," he said, "it struck me lately that there are one or two little things—trifles you know—ought to be seen to——"

She did not admit it nor deny it. She moved somewhere beyond the fret and turmoil alike of change and progress.

"The Manse is too much for one person to clean," continued John Parish with the brisk assurance of a man uncertain about many things.

At that Mrs. Grant ceased to lean against the doorway. She withdrew her eyes from the yellow window pane. In her the spirit of liberty was not dead only slumbering.

"Meaning a change?" she asked with dangerous brevity.

John Parish was flung instantly on expostulations, explanations, large vague gestures. He meant nothing of the kind, he could not hear of such a thing—he had merely expressed himself clumsily. What he intended to say was simply . . . It flowed on rather dispiritedly, and it was evident that Mrs. Grant was unable to satisfy herself that no reflection was cast upon her services. She preferred, she said, absolute frankness. If things were wrong they were wrong. If dust was about the fault was not bettered by calling in the whole village to talk about it. Not that they wouldn't jump at the chance, if she knew anything of Inver-clover they would be falling over each other on the doorstep. But speaking of broken windows made her wonder whether a respectable woman had a fair chance of keeping rooms as they should be kept, and whether the damp on the ceiling of the second spare room made things easier. There was, she hastened to add, a right

and a wrong, and if someone had been putting false ideas into his head she would like that person to undertake the cooking, washing up, fires, beds and care of a house without one word of complaint or a week's holiday for ten years. She wondered if such a person would do so, and from some knowledge of the personal habits of the woman she spoke of, and whose name she wouldn't deign to mention, she was in no doubt whatever about the answer.

"But my good woman," broke in John Parish, "all I said was that it struck me the Manse requires overhauling, inside and out. It looks rather dingy. Not to us, mind you, but anyone coming here. The blind there. And I suppose that's dry rot on the landing."

"In a house like this, sir," said Mrs. Grant, sinking from indignation into her normal pessimism, "it is better to let well alone. Once you start chipping and changing, where are you?" She paused, eyeing him challengingly, and then repeated with profundity as one clinching an argument by an immortal truth, "Where are you——?"

John Parish turned away and walking outside stared moodily about. He knew the whole place was falling to bits, the grounds overgrown, the house dirty and neglected. Lately it had come to seem to him a reproach. The strangeness of habit! Only a month ago had anyone pointed out the broken beam in the drawing-room he would have laughed vaguely and spoken of himself as a careless old bachelor. Then Iona Grahame after two months' absence had returned, no better in health, but carrying in her eyes something new to him yet something that he suspected had been waiting there all the time. (He may have been mistaken, but so it seemed to him.) It was during the afternoon which she spent at the Manse telling him of places she had seen with her Aunt Jean—not wonderful travelling to be sure, but wonderful enough for Inverclover—it was as they wandered into the drawing-

room that she had wiped the filthy window pane with her handkerchief and laughed up at him and called him a woman hater. An incident so trivial as that had sunk into his memory. At the time he had protested smilingly against such a charge, and was confronted with the astonishing truth that he had lived alone in Inverclover for fifteen years. He was forty—a man no longer young. Thinking it over that night, he could not recall in his past any youthful infatuation, any mild flirtation. There seemed in his youth to be nothing but preparation for exams, belated expeditions with his father to second-hand book shops, periods of absolute blank boredom, and again, awaited with secret eagerness, renewed preparation for exams. In all these years no adventure, nothing fine or ignoble, an existence less romantic, less sexual, less hazardous than a single day in the life of the morning's fox. Infinitely less—pitifully inferior.

It was twelve o'clock. He listened absently to the striking of the notes and re-entered the house.

"Mrs. Grant," he called. Again the clip clop of her dismembered shoe sounded along the passage. Again she stood listlessly on the threshold of the hall. "I shall be very busy to-day, Mrs. Grant, very rushed"—he broke off and then rather hurriedly, "Miss Grahame is coming to tea."

There was an hour before lunch. Many a great sermon has been written in an hour: He closed the door, drew in his chair, faced with quiet courage the blank sheet of paper, and then to concentrate his ideas the better stared innocently out upon the neglected lawn. James was right—it was not the kind of garden most people would care about. But Dr. Crum had not kept hens. Launched securely on this sea of speculation John Parish realised that the pullets could be wired into the paddock. That would settle the fox difficulty too. Nobody could object to hens as hens. It was the kind of liberties they took. . . .

And suddenly, arising from the heart of the belated rhododendron bush a spot suspected by him for some time, a defaulting wyandotte arose with triumph and went cackling over the grass.

"They must not do that sort of thing," cried John Parish peevishly. "That's at the back of all this trouble. Laying anywhere. . . ."

Pushing back his chair he hurried out, discovered four eggs, thus pointing clearly not to a solitary mis-demeanour but a vice, and stood frowning darkly at a group of expectant fowls—scurrying with blind optimism about his feet.

The desolate form of James was visible over the kitchen garden wall. It occurred to John Parish that he ought to send for Macdonald, the local builder, carpenter, undertaker and general handyman. There was no harm in talking things over. Let him look in after his dinner—be sure of that—not later than two o'clock. James listened to these admonitions without comment. Warmed by these activities John Parish marched resolutely away from the gardener, knowing so very acutely how scornful and acrid was his gaze, and returning to the study was dismayed to find half an hour had slipped mysteriously away.

Now if there was one thing he could never bring himself to do it was to write a sermon in snippets or against time.

"But to-night," he concluded together with a thousand other colleagues throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, "to-night when everything's quiet and I'm more in the mood, I'll have ample time—*ample* time——"

IV

Alexander Macdonald, who accompanied Inver-clover from the cradle to the grave, was not a man to be overridden by a minister. It was all very fine for Mr. Parish to whisk him about the Manse, which he

knew a deal better than anyone in it, aye and his father, honest man, before him. A poor-like thing it would be to swindle a minister. Leave that to Glasgow bodies and the kind.

"Now there's dry rot if you like," said John Parish, rather worsted over some structural details in the basement.

"Aye it's dry rot weel eneugh," sniffed Alexander Macdonald without yielding, "but where does it lead ye, Maister Parish? Maybe from tap tae bottom o' the hoose——"

"But it'll spread," persisted the minister, stung to a professional retort.

"Aye it'll spread," agreed Alexander Macdonald grimly, and was absorbed into an immense silence.

Somewhat chastened John Parish conducted him to the second bedroom, where the boards of the floor trembled and rocked beneath their feet.

"You see," said the minister with triumph, "there's a floor for you, Macdonald——"

The village builder made a curious shrill squeak somewhere in his back teeth. It held out no hope of progress.

"I mind Dr. Crum fashin' himsel' owre that self-same floor," he said, "an' where's Dr. Crum the now——?"

It was as though the old gentleman had not escaped any the less lightly in another world.

"Yes—yes," agreed John Parish, "but fifteen years have passed since then——"

"Aye, an' the floor's no been in use——"

"But it might be, one never knows——"

Alexander Macdonald ruminated on the prospect and was convinced it was sheer irresponsible speculation for which he had no tolerance.

"An' it might also happen that ye accepted a call to the south, Maister Parish, though, mind ye, I speak withoot prejudice, but it's no out o' possibility and

then where's yir fine new floor? Ye canna pack a floor like a box o' sermons——"

They left the room and tramped slowly downstairs.

"I want to put the house in proper order," said John Parish abruptly. "I want it painted and repaired inside and out. I suppose I can have an estimate for that——"

"Och aye ye can hev an estimate, Maister Parish, but," with an aggrieved laugh, "surely ye ken the expense is terrible—it'll maybe be—maybe be—eh sir I daur'na say hoo much what wi' crackit windows an' rotten woodwork, let alone structural delapidations. Tak' ma advice, Maister Parish, an' just forget a' aboot it. The Manse is no sound but it's leaning taegether. Once begin playing high jinks wi' doors an' windies and wha kens whether the whole building micht not descend as a judgment about oor ears——"

Deeply stirred by such a vision Alexander Macdonald shook his head warningly, took up his cap and without any further reference to a matter best forgotten by prudent men, went out of the house and up the drive.

It was three o'clock when a message came from Garroch. John Parish tore open the envelope. He held the letter a moment in his hand.

"There will be no answer, Mrs. Grant," he said, and rising closed the door and stood perfectly still looking dolefully upon the faded carpet. Iona was not coming.

Again he unfolded the letter. It was written in her curious flowing handwriting, calling him by the name of her childhood.

"DEAR MR. JOHN,—

"I am so very sorry but I may not come to-day as I have a slight temperature. I was so looking forward to it. But do you come, if you can be bothered on Monday. On Wednesday Sir Joseph Preston, the Edinburgh doctor, comes just to see

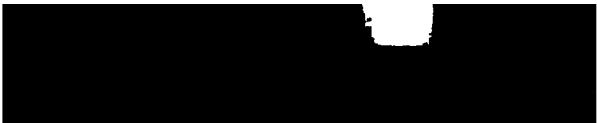
how much better I am after my holiday. But we will forget all about that on Monday, won't we? Father will be out with Colonel Gask, but Aunt Chris and Aunt Jean are looking forward to seeing you.

"Yours very sincerely,

"IONA.

"P.S.—Can you not lend me some of your strength, Mr. John?"

He read the postscript sorrowfully. The little jest flung in the face of her calamity raised no answering smile. It came too near to tragedy. Then sitting down he took up his pen and suddenly began to write to her, carried away by his love of her, his pity for her, his own deep loneliness. He wrote disjointed words, sacred words, poured them out burning. . . . Gradually his pen began to slacken. At last it stopped altogether. He stared with a kind of repulsion at the things he had said, then tearing up the sheet of paper he threw it in the basket and went out of the room.



CHAPTER III

AFTERNOON TEA

I

THE cardinal difference between Miss Christina and Miss Jean Macdougall was one of disposition. In outward appearance they were both gaunt, large-boned women, strong featured, with shrewd blue eyes heavily lidded (as were the late Queen Victoria's), and in the habit of appearing, indoors and out, in black alpaca gowns, Shetland shawls and enormous umbrellas, which in summer guarded their weather-beaten complexions from the frail sunlight of an August afternoon, and in winter protected the upper reaches of their persons from "splatters" of snow, rain, hail and wind that through an occasional act of grace fell in the commonplace English fashion and not in a direction parallel to the road. The Miss Macdougalls delighted in climatic difficulties just as they bestirred themselves when domestic trouble called for those tough qualities that were the birth-right of the old school. Being women of immense indifference to illness (in themselves only) and contemptuous of weaklings (outside the range of Garroch), or indeed any person who succumbed under ninety, they took an honest pride in marching to hear Mr. Parish, morning and evening, refusing absolutely to order out the barouche even had Duncan Haggis been within call, which he took forethought should never occur. They thought little enough of John Parish's intellect (poor man), being reared in their youth upon strong Highland meat, but they took a keen and un-



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diminished interest in noticing who was there and who wasn't, and frequently enquiring after service for the health of frailer persons who had taken courage at a thunderstorm and remained indoors.

Miss Jean was the weaker vessel of the twain, being secretly given to sentiment, and a sufferer from rheumatism: Miss Christina was impregnable to softening of any kind, though as she very rarely admitted "a shade hard o' hearin'." Moreover, as Miss Jean was the younger she was the more to be deplored. She was also stouter, and with plump cheeks like a ripe apple. Both ladies were fond of a "little music," but whereas Miss Christina played boldly with a high air one coronach after another, and sang in a deep menacing voice ballads of death, and lamentations for the deceased, Miss Jean sought the piano at those times when the last rays of the sun were falling upon the ancient discoloured keys, yellow as sere leaves, and when the wistful shadows of eventide were creeping again throughout the still corridors of Garroch. Like many another Scottish lady then and now she would play by ear and very movingly those imperishable melodies that link the old Scotland with the new.

It was a lasting grief, and reproach to them that they "did not have the Gaelic," for then they could have carried on a conversation beyond the understanding of the maids, taking them thus upon the flank, and being enabled to instance prevailing indiscretions even while they were unconsciously in operation. But it was not to be. The old tongue died with their father, Colonel John, who passing away in the sixties left a cherished memory in Inverclover for his old-world habits, and the fine cordiality of his nature when disarmed by the kindly influence of strong drink. With a reverence for ancestry and tradition almost Chinese in its intensity, both sisters would often illustrate a point or recall a circumstance by the words "Ye mind how Colonel John," indicating (were strangers present)



with a jerk of the head a portrait of the old warrior, terrific in Highland dress, and regarding with compassionate eyes the large decanters on the side-table. It had been a great wrench for the two ladies leaving their home in Invershaws for Garroch, but "what must be, must be," as Miss Christina remarked, and the rich presence of their father had made the house more homelike. The Miss Macdougalls were so scandalised at the second marriage of the Laird that they had never crossed the doors until the second Mrs. Grahame was carried very properly to the old graveyard. When they agreed to come, it was with the determination to do their duty towards "that puir lamb, Iona, who was in no way to blame," and from that moment Miss Christina rebuked Miss Jean for "jockeying with the child like an auld fule," and Miss Jean asked Miss Christina tartly whether anyone but herself considered shortbread nourishing food for an infant scarce turned four.

The two ladies rose at six (otherwise who could know how long the maids would lie snoring in their beds), they retired at ten. Upon the landing Miss Christina would light the candles, hand one to her sister and remark "A good night to ye, Jean." To which Miss Jean, accepting her candle with corresponding pomp, would reply, "Good night to ye, Christina." Both old ladies would then enter their respective rooms, shut and lock the doors. There was no need to bar the windows because the Miss Macdougalls had no patience with English notions about sleeping in a draught. They had no desire to live past ninety, and they had yet to learn that their ancestors (determined nonagenarians) had ever tempted Providence by imitating stirks in a byre.

Finding the staff of Garroch a hotbed of aged and tyrannical Grahames, ruled by an ancient servitor who answered the door from an upper window (being fond of a nap in the afternoons) the Miss Macdougalls, upon



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a day when the Laird was away and deaf to the shrill lamentations of his clan, cleared the roost, and introduced a family broken like hounds to their whistle.

There was Hamish the butler, who, as Miss Christina frequently remarked in his hearing, she only retained because of his condition, he being a Papist and therefore hardly "compot mentals," as she put it—there was Mrs. MacColl his wife, and Sheila their daughter. Hamish, who bore a red beard about his duties with a deftness that lent a hereditary note to the establishment, was the son of the gamekeeper who had accepted with pride and tried affection the infuriated kicks, blows and oaths of Colonel John. Out of the males of his enormous family, he was training for Garroch House not merely his understudy and successor, but the future keeper, gardener, and coachman, and from the regiment of his girls a housemaid, a stillroom maid, and a cook. Once a year it was understood that the Miss Macdougalls would go upon a visit to Edinburgh, staying there for a month, and taking Iona with them. During that vacation when the two ladies swept like cormorants up and down Princes Street, Mrs. MacColl was pledged to satisfy the demands of nature, and to make no reference upon any future occasion to a fecundity that the Miss Macdougalls were not prepared to discuss even between themselves. The mind of a child links one thing to another with innocent fingers, seeing life as a daisy chain of white fancies, and so Iona came to look on Edinburgh as a noble toy shop, where babies could be purchased and brought up as scullery maids or queens, and from whose grey stones her aunts had taken Sheila, or Elizabeth, Jockie or whichever it might be and presented them to Mrs. MacColl. The only pity was that Mrs. MacColl rarely seemed grateful or touched, but kept sniffing "Anither girl," or "Anither boy," and once "Baith," when even Iona wondered at her aunts' extravagance.

The only other precautionary measure was that no



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child, male or female, under fifteen was, under any circumstances, except sudden death, to be seen or heard in the house with the exception of that great evening when the servants, retainers and others gave to Garroch its air of proper feudalism. To see the Miss Macdougalls asking the terrified children their names, was, upon that splendid occasion, a memorable but never touching spectacle.

II

Throughout Garroch, upon that sunny afternoon, the world was standing still. Upstairs the two Miss Macdougalls, being persons deeply occupied with household duties throughout the remainder of the day, were in the custom of resting, wet or fine, hot or cold, beneath plaids of Macdougall tartan, blinds drawn until four o'clock. At that hour Garroch would awake above and below stairs and preparations for tea, for which the two old ladies had a great affection, were solemnised.

Hamish, secure in the butler's pantry, sprawling most painfully midway between two rickety deck chairs, was dreaming peacefully when the front bell rang. Knowing that such a thing must be a delusion he eased his aching limbs and settled himself again for slumber. Upon which, unmistakably, the bell sounded again. He opened his eyes. With childlike faith in the ultimate justice of life he waited. It might, one never knew, be a mouse gnawing at the wire. Such things were narrated. But Sheila, his eldest daughter who (being seventeen) never slept and detested the fragrant after luncheon period, happened to be cleaning a window in the tower of Garroch. The approaching figure of John Parish delighted her. He had come to see Miss Iona. He was carrying, waving them in a helpless fashion as he trudged along, a bunch of daffodils. Bringing coals to Newcastle. If Sheila wanted any further inducement to leave her duties it

was the memory of her father sunk in slumber down below. Such a chance might never occur again. "Faither," she screamed afar off (a habit Scots servants delight in), "Faither, the meenister's spanking up the drive."

"The meenister," snarled Hamish crossly.

Again the bell tolled—this time with decision.

"Devil tak' the body," he cried peevishly, "what ails the man wi' his ding, ding, dingin'. He'll hev the auld leddies oot o' their beds an' then there some dingin' an' no error——"

Alive to the personal share he might take in such exercises Hamish scurried down the corridor across the hall and towards the front door while Sheila in a flutter of emotions persisted in rousing her mother to hear the news.

"It's you, Maister Parish," cried the butler. "Eh now, think o' that. Did ye ring, sir—what, ye did? Come, come. An' me just gone this minute to hunt up a lettuce for the tea. Tak' yir ways in, Maister Parish." (Confidentially.)—"The auld leddies are under their plaids the now an' the Laird's away up the glen to Drumcairn. Sheila, a glass o' sherry wine for Maister Parish—will ye no? Sheila, lassie, see if Miss Iona's astir——"

"Do not wake her," counselled John Parish faint-heartedly. But Sheila was pitiless in an affair of this kind.

"Everything going on well?" he asked Hamish.

The butler gave him a shrewd look and drew him a step or two nearer the window.

"The Laird's at it again," he confided in a shrill whisper; "ye mind I told you aince afore."

John Parish nodded. He remembered the selling of the woods of Gloam.

"Well, followin' yon he pickit up awhile, an' was his old self, though mind ye, sir, the auld leddies never so much as caught a whisper o' the transaction. They



point out the bonny trees to this day as the pride o' Garroch. Is there no a man for ye? Hech he keeps his ain troubles an' thinks naebody can see it's breakin' his heart."

"It would ease his mind to let Miss Christina know, Hamish."

"It would, sir—it would. And there's no a heid like Miss Christina's in the north. But that was never the Grahame way, Maister Parish, no, nor the Macdougall either."

John Parish nodded absently. To him the Laird was a very unpractical obstinate old man.

"He's fair eaten up wi' his ain conceits, puir auld gentleman. He imagines that the condition o' his affairs is known only to himsel'. Whereas Miss Christina——"

"She knows, Hamish?"

"I suspect she has a notion," he returned with a cunning look.

"And keeps silent."

"I tell ye, Maister Parish, when the Laird comes to Miss Christina she'll give a heed, no before."

John Parish shook his head over such an attitude, which was beyond his comprehension.

"And it's going the round, sir, that the country between Upper Clover and Drumcairn is under a like shadow."

"Ruinous!" said John Parish. "Can nothing be done?"

The butler made a gesture eloquent of despair. He was of that school whose lives are knit inseparably with the joys and sorrows, youth and old age of a passing race. To him and his kind gossip carried no taint and was uttered with no harmful motive, friendship was unspoilt by familiarity, loyalty was never dimmed by arrogance.

"Here she comes, sir——" He broke off, "Here's Miss Iona."



Afternoon Tea

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Into the room, like the advance guard of beauty or some mediæval pageant, stalked a gaunt deerhound, his mournful eyes fixed inscrutably beyond them, beyond the room, watching, as it were, some far-off treasured hunting-ground. A moment in which the door was suddenly vacant, and then a girl passed through it and Hamish, slipping out, left them together.

John Parish looked at her searchingly, saying nothing. And she said not a word but took his flowers and buried her pale face in them, and raised dark changeeful eyes, haunted by sadness, unfathomable as always to him. She was thinner, he thought, more pallorous, but the day was hot, and Iona's not the rich colouring of summer, nor the heyday of youth, but delicate as rare china. Least of all modern. To such as the Ewing-Dunns there would always be something odd, or food for sly laughter in Iona Grahame, dressed so simply in her plain old-fashioned frock, ignorant of the common-places of contemporary life, given to long silences, innocent of artifice and small talk. In an age driven ever onwards by lust of power, of wealth, of passing things, her spirit of repose was of another century so that some stranger meeting her alone in the gloaming of Garroch might well rub his eyes, and think he were dreaming of what once had been.

Beside her John Parish, large boned, ruddy cheeked, southern bred, was like a man of another world. Nor was he altogether unaware of the disparity. Not so long ago Iona, her rich abundant hair falling upon the shoulders of her blue riding coat, her silver-topped whip in her hand, the deerhound at her heels, had enchanted him as any other happy child might well do in the springtime. But now Iona had smoothed away the years that divided them, and in growing up had only fled further away down the centuries. He was not merely forty—he was irreclaimably moulded into the configuration of his age, moving within known



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boundaries, testing life crudely, fettered for always to commonplace things.

"You are tired, Iona," he said, sitting awkwardly beside her by the open window.

She smiled at him. "Just a little."

"I was sorry when your letter reached me on Saturday—sorry for you and sorry for myself."

"For yourself, Mr. John. Why?"

He loved her for her innocence, and smiled at her in his homely way.

"I had made my little plans," he went on, "and I was waiting for your advice."

"Oh tell me, Mr. John, what were they?"

"About the Manse and the garden, Iona. I'm going to pull up. Why did you never tell me how careless I was becoming. Have you no interest in me?"

"Of course I have."

"Do you remember the day of the window pane?"

"But I should hate to see the Manse all smelling of paint, it wouldn't be like you. I would never come again."

"Everything's out at elbows, slovenly, the gardens overgrown. The house is unfit for——"

"Yes."

He gave her a scared look and shook his head. He was making poor headway, and already the old ladies must be stirring above.

"Iona," he said abruptly.

She bent a little closer as she used to do when he whispered some grand secret in her ear.

"I want to speak to you—*seriously*. You've known me ever since you were a child and you have reached—well——"

"Years of discretion, Mr. John?"

"As you say. You are eighteen."

"I am putting my hair up next week."

"You are, eh?"



Afternoon Tea

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"Will you be glad to see it up?"

He murmured something and with sudden laughter in her eyes she added, "If you promise not to tell, Mr. John, I'll put it up before you go—for a joke."

"Yes—yes—Iona, I'd like that," he said, and stared with troubled eyes upon the floor. "I am forty," he went on heavily, "and I was wondering. I wouldn't have thought about it but something broke into my life suddenly—sharply. I'm not blind to my faults, Iona, but I never realised that they are come so near past mending. A man goes all to pieces by himself. Doesn't care. Loses a grip of himself. And I'm not a boy now. Soon it will be too late. One forgets how the years pass."

"And something reminded you?"

"Yes."

"What, Mr. John?"

He hesitated, his neck growing scarlet where it was pressed deeply upon his collar, his hands damp and sore.

"Perhaps it was you, Iona."

She drew a little away from him, and a faint tremor passed over her. "Father said——"

He stared miserably at her for a moment. "Yes."

"He said I am a woman now."

"So you are, Iona—so you are."

She shook her head with sudden emphasis.

"But I'm not. You do not understand. I'm not. Can you not think of me as Iona of long ago, whatever people say. Promise me—please promise me."

He soothed her bravely.

"I will wait," he said, "until you tell me. Let me wait, Iona."

She laid her little hand for an instant on his, and then withdrew it, saying nothing.

"Mr. John," she murmured at last, "you have not told me about your house."



"My house," he echoed. "Oh, of course, my house." He fumbled in his pocket with a heavy hand. "This letter is from my sister, whose husband has just died. She has no family and nowhere to go."

"And you will make a home for her?"

"I do not know, I was wondering——"

"But you said the Manse was going to be cleaned."

He met the clear innocence of her eyes, and replied:

"It would be a good thing—I do not know——"

He broke off and pushed the crumpled note back into his pocket. Opposite them against the wall stood a venerable piano sweetly toned.

"Sing something, Iona, while I arrange these daffodils. Perhaps I can get a little water from Hamish."

He rose quickly and started off towards the door.

"But you can't hear me in the pantry, Mr. John," she called after him from the keyboard.

Something he replied from the doorway, but never halted, making blindly across the hall, the yellow flowers dangling from his hand.

III

Miss Christina was of that iron school who face tribulation cheerfully, calamity with equanimity, but are uneasy and guarded under a smiling heaven. Miss Jean, however, being cast in more homely mould, had her moments of relaxation. Seldom did she dare to flaunt this deplorable feebleness under her sister's kindling eye, but since by the grace of Providence the sense of liberty smoulders in every human breast (and were she heartened by company) Miss Jean would hold out for a time as a sand castle defies the slow and matchless tide, or light batteries contend a forlorn resistance before the mournful certainty of heavy guns. Not that there was anything vindictive about Miss Christina. Honest wrath she reserved for actual



Afternoon Tea

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opposition. With her sister she did not argue so much as lower the temperature.

If upon that sunny afternoon, and knowing John Parish was downstairs with Iona, Miss Jean acted injudiciously it must be allowed she was sorely tempted. It was barely four o'clock and Christina seldom appeared until fifteen minutes after the fitful notes of the hall clock. There was, as always, a frail chance that she would not hear the gong. One never knew.

This thing Miss Jean considered, and having a great affection for John Parish, and a shrewd eye to his state of heart, she dared greatly, and assuring herself that she had every right to please herself she rose from amongst her Macdougall tartans, drew up the blinds, and having tidied her pretty white hair, went quietly past the ominous silence of Miss Christina's room and so downstairs. She could hear Iona playing in the drawing-room. Perhaps—who knows—they might ask her to sing some old favourite. Poor Miss Jean—it would set her above Christina's tragedies for many a day!

At the foot of the stairs, knowing exactly what was in her mind, stood Hamish. It was such a moment as when the heroine nerved by despair overcomes the warder by some daring counterfuge.

"Miss Christina's asleep," she whispered before a word could pass his lips. "Better let her bide a wee." The butler was disturbed. He was not certain whether Miss Jean should sacrifice him in this off-hand way.

From the drawing-room came the sound of Iona's low voice singing "Joy of My Heart." They stood listening intently, and when it was ended Miss Jean moved on without a word, while motionless, stricken with misgiving, Hamish remained, pulling nervously at his beard, fated within the next half-hour to withstand as best he could the ironies and personal comment in which Miss Christina possessed a recognised talent.



But it was unfair of Miss Jean to take advantage of his manly spirit. He regarded her comely contour silhouetted for a moment against the polished door, with a hurt affection and a kind of benevolent compassion such as the Almighty might evidence, to whom our inmost thoughts are as the written page. He knew perfectly well who was Julius Cæsar in Garroch. He was also profoundly moved by the certain knowledge that he would catch it for not informing Miss Christina that her sister Miss Jean was whiles cheeping at the piano not to speak of gossiping like a magpie with the minister. He was as certain of a hectic five minutes as he was that Miss Jean, poor lady, would come off no lighter. But as a married man ought he to bide patiently there? Ought he not to awake Miss Christina, siding with the strong arm in the accepted way of prudence? Ought he not to shout through the key-hole (the door being secure against burglars, murderers, and Miss Christina "hard o' hearin'"), ought he not to bellow without compunction "Awake, Mem, arouse yirsel', Miss Christina, for downstairs there's fine goings-on, an' the drawing-room fair hotchin' wi' scandal."

Suddenly the thin voice of Miss Jean broke upon that moment of indecision, singing with a kind of historic sprightliness and sentiment "Comin' through the Rye." Hamish listened intently, beating time with one hairy hand upon the banister. It was beyond dispute that anyone who could bring himself to whip poor Miss Jean from off the piano-stool (and she as happy as a bird) would be no better than a brigand, or a man from Paisley.

And already up in that great bare room Miss Christina was dimly aware that something was amiss. She lay for a while staring steadily at the drawn blinds, turning over in her mind things of the past and future, coming back always to Garroch, which was her particular anxiety—Garroch and all therein.

Of James Grahame, whom she knew for no more than a helpless old man carried ruthlessly into ever deeper water by the greatness of his pride. So far as she was concerned her creed forbade her to interfere. Long had she watched despair haunting his eyes, seen how his thoughts were ever driving through mist, known without bitterness or impatience, that she and only she could save what remained.

Of Iona, and the visit of the doctor on Wednesday. She had her own ideas about Iona's health. She was ready whatever the verdict. She had been ready for many years. On Wednesday—Wednesday the 25th of June. And to-day was the 23rd of June—the day her father Colonel John had died.

To Miss Christina the past was more precious than the present, and to-day made supportable by memories of yesterday. Once again she recalled as a melancholy duty, and in detail, the last hours of that eccentric old gentleman, and travelling into the eighteenth century, which was to her the turning point of national prestige and Macdougall grandeur, worked out with undimmed satisfaction that had Colonel John been born in 1815 instead of 1820 he would have seen (even at a tender age) their great-grand-aunt Helen, who as a child had played ride a cock-horse upon the ample knee of the renowned Lord Lovat. This amazing coincidence was a real comfort to her in days when houses more ancient than hers were forgotten, the Highlands given over to tourists, and an old race driven forth for the better pleasuring of southern tenants.

It will be granted that was not the moment to sing, no matter how blithely, "Comin' Through the Rye."

Miss Christina started when she caught the lilt of it, but remembering Iona had never seen Colonel John, and could not therefore be expected to recall that this was the anniversary of his death, she passed onwards to waken Jean. The open door gave her



food for reflection. Thus Miss Christina moved onwards and came upon Hamish as a golden eagle might swoop majestically upon a rabbit.

"I was on the way to give ye a knock, Miss Christina," explained the butler but without confidence.

"My man," returned Miss Christina, "ye must not weary yoursel' capering up and downstairs on my account. That's no your work. It's standing scratching the banisters with your fingers while Miss Jean keeps up her music."

"Mem, I was minded to tell ye Maister Parish is come this hour back."

"Hets, Hamish, why tell me? Can I no run into the pantry to ask ye? Or maybe ye could send me a scribble on a bit paper."

"I kenned finely it was no the day for provokin' ye," wailed the butler. "I kenned it richt enough."

"Then," concluded Miss Christina bluntly, "the more Papist you—ye Jesuitical buzzard." Soothed and strengthened (if that wonderful woman ever lacked vitality)—she swept majestically onwards, and Hamish, in the full assurance that this was but a fleeting passage of arms preliminary to prolonged shelling, watched her go with shining eyes. "Jesuitical buzzard," he repeated lingeringly. "Eh, sirs, heard ye ever the like o' that now."

Around the tea-table they were talking very pleasantly upon Elizabeth, the elder MacColl, who had looked with favour upon Andrew Mackenzie.

"I always said there was something more than met the eye," Miss Jean was saying knowingly; "she's a bonny little thing, and there's nothing like young marriages."

"You think so," smiled John Parish.

"Indeed I do," emphasised Miss Jean, "it's only natural, though" (with a side glance at Iona) "I'm an old maid myself."

"Whose fault was that, I wonder?"

Miss Jean, delighted beyond measure, ducked her head over the teacups.

"I heard a story once."

"Nonsense, lassie—nonsense—who could tell on me?"

"Father said——"

"Whisht—your father—don't believe a word of it."

"He said there was a subaltern in the Camerons——"

"Malcolm Moir—he was a mere boy——"

"And a Doctor somebody——"

Miss Jean lifted her hands as though amazed at such duplicity.

"Did his name begin with an A?" asked John Parish with rising spirits.

"Or a B?" put in Iona.

For a time Miss Jean was too overcome at such foolishness to reply.

"Try C," she said for fear they should lose heart.

"Maybe it was C, but don't think I'm taken in by your impudence—not I."

"Was it Cairns?"

"No it was nothing of the kind."

"Perhaps it was Campbell—Doctor Campbell?"

"What about that drunken body," asked Miss Christina, appearing suddenly in the doorway and wearing the detached air of a raven about to dine.

In the pained silence that followed this destructive comment Miss Jean looked into the teapot as one might seek for sanctuary, rallied, and replied with admirable restraint.

"You forget, Christina, the man was disappointed."

For a moment it looked as though a love tragedy were coming to light.

"And well might be with a wife in the asylum and a wooden leg," came the crushing emendation of Miss Christina.



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"He hadn't a wooden leg, Christina, an' well ye know it."

Miss Christina was instantly indifferent.

"Have it your own way, Jean—what's it matter after all these years? It's an old story, Mr. Parish," she explained, "and not elevating at any time. He was a man of my father's age and——"

"*Doctor Campbell*," expostulated Miss Jean, aghast at such realism. "*Christina*."

"He was bald as a coot, Jean."

"Many a man's lost his hair," remarked her sister hotly.

"I don't deny it, Jean, I don't deny it, and I cannot see how this can interest Mr. Parish. I admit I never liked the body, but then I never could abear the clicking of *false teeth*."

Under this last dismal revelation and to preserve intact the remaining features of the unhappy Doctor Campbell, Miss Jean, crimson with mortification, said with acerbity:

"Elizabeth is engaged to Andrew."

Miss Christina looked mournfully out of the window, and Hamish, bearing a hot kettle, paused with parental anticipation.

"I suppose it was bound to be," she reflected aloud, and the butler, knowing Andrew for a bigamist, trailed pensively from the room.

"Andrew's a good fellow," said John Parish stoutly.

Miss Christina emitted an omniscient whistle through her great Macdougall nose.

"It's easy getting married," she commented.

"They must get married sometime, Christina," put in Miss Jean.

"That's what your Aunt Hagar used to say, Jean," returned her sister with a sigh. "She learned her lesson, poor woman."

The sun was still shining bravely outside, but within the air was cooler, and likely to keep falling.

Already Miss Jean, who had listened by the hour to the reminiscences of her unfortunate Aunt Hagar, was appreciating the mystery and uncertainty of life. Ere Miss Christina had finished with her she would be thankful she was prepared not merely for the idle shadows of an earthly pilgrimage but looking further. Lower than that she could not reach. From that point Miss Christina cried, as it were, hail and farewell and plunged into awful depths.

"Mr. Parish's sister is coming to live with him," said Iona, hoping to drift back to less intimate channels.

Miss Christina pondered upon the wisdom of this innovation.

"My brother-in-law Angus Lamont died recently," explained John Parish. "He was a minister in Glasgow and contracted a chill while answering a call at Peebles. No more tea, thank you."

Miss Christina was stirred by some remote chord of memory.

"Would he be a Lamont of Kindrone?" she asked.

No, John Parish was sure he was just a Lamont.

Miss Christina was silent awhile, turning the matter over.

"Has Mrs. Lamont any children?" she enquired.

No, she was unfortunate.

Miss Christina gave her sister a look as much as to say, "What kind of an object can this be?" Then determined to see the best in the poor woman: "Is she country bred?"

"Glasgow," replied John Parish.

For a moment Miss Christina stared at Miss Jean and Miss Jean stared at Miss Christina, after which they both regarded the minister with quiet pessimism.

"It may only be for a little while," he hastened to add, "until she settles down. It will be lonely for her, but she—she will bring her cat."

Following upon such clear evidence Miss Christina, being ever charitable with regard to persons of weak



intellect, removed the subject of Mrs. Lamont altogether from her mind.

"May I come with you to the gate?" said Iona.

His honest face lit up with happiness, and while she went up to her room he walked noisily about the hall whistling as best he could his own impression of a Highland reel. A few minutes later she was coming back, walking slowly down the stairs wearing a very sedate expression.

Her hair was up!

"Bravo," he cried. "Bravo."

"But do I look grown up?" she asked anxiously. "Tell me, please."

"Great heavens, no," he shouted. "You look about ten, Iona, or like a child in a charade."

"I'm afraid," she said half tearfully, "I shall never be quite grown up."



CHAPTER IV

DAVID

I

DAVID MANNING had always been irrepressible. As a little boy, golden haired, rosy cheeked, stamping about on tireless legs, shouting and laughing, clinging manfully to the cat's tail, leaping suddenly upon poor Mrs. Manning (never an empire-builder) he scorned the traditional half tones of the only child. His mother could have tolerated a pensive little girl dressed in soft colours, a tender anæmic creature. She might have even ventured upon two of them separated, of course, by discreet distances of time. But one David was a lesson. Two Davids would have wrecked the house.

At the age of eight David, long since the adored affliction of successive governesses, was sent to a most estimable preparatory school at which only the sons of approved gentlemen in the most expensive localities were encouraged to attend. Through this place of juvenile snobbery he passed unscathed, riding home each evening in a cab ordered specially for the preservation of a youthful Hebrew, and in moments of exuberance driving the horse.

From a public school where Francis Manning foresaw, with parental cunning, that his son would be thrown with the offsprings of financiers and lords, David passed to Cambridge, and laughed his sunny laughter in the bleak corridors of St. Agatha's, passing by the aid of an elderly coach certain ordeals necessary



for one's peace of mind. By the aid of this same gentleman, who begged him on no account to muddle his head with text-books but simply to learn by heart the symbols he chalked upon the board, David, together with a band of charming and happy colleagues, flocked to their seats for the "General" and answered questions dimly understood, with an ease, a precision, that could only point to a wide sympathy with a host of kindred subjects. That over David was faced by his final examination, and, quieted by the earnest words of Mr. James, the coach, chose wisely and well the History Special. The amount of knowledge sufficient to obtain a Pass Degree in history is so slight, so delicate a thing, that David was intrigued into an interview with Mr. Bunn, who, at St. Agatha's, attended to such side issues as well as the sterner walks of the Tripos.

David, despite provocation, regarded Mr. Bunn with tolerance, and from time to time compiled essays upon the foundation of printing in England, the origin and meaning of "Hundred," "Witanagemot," and "Villain," and sometimes, to please the good man, attended an occasional meeting of the Historical Society for a deeper discussion upon an essay by Marshall, who was known to be a dead certainty for a first. Mr. Bunn was quite out of touch with all normal things, was either ridiculously grave over some trifling matter, or else painfully flippant, and betrayed through both moods an insufferable affectation peculiar to many other academic gentlemen.

In his last most blinding failure, David stared at a single absurd question, "What was a Guild?" He pondered upon it for quite half an hour. It left him cold. But further down the page was something very different. "State," it ran, "in brief, and with examples drawn from his campaigns, the reasons for Napoleon's downfall."

It made him smile to see the examiner play right



David

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into his hands like that. He had been reading only the night before a rare and greatly soiled volume which he had picked up second hand and called quite simply "Napoleon's Loves." The book had captivated him. It had given him an insight into the Emperor's character, his home life, and his tempestuous temperament that had quite scattered a few vague generalities gleaned from Mr. Bunn. He felt he could handle Napoleon. Pushing aside the foolish paper of questions he arranged himself comfortably, and wrote an article such as "The Fortnightly" would have returned, but would have considered, however, briefly, upon "Napoleon the Man of Environment." David was a rapid writer when spurred on to a thing, but, despite the way his tongue lolled from his boyish lips, despite the fact that his golden hair was standing on end, and his ingenuous blue eyes strained like marbles, despite all this he had barely got half-way through when the clock struck the hour. Still he sped on, hearing with frantic ears the squeaking of chairs, the tramping of feet, the sighings, and blowings of noses, a senile voice afar off, "Now, gentlemen, please." His paper was dragged away from him at last. It disappeared, that epic, leaving unanswered, finely scorned, nine other paltry and obscure trifles.

Late that night a certain examiner, chilled to mechanical indifference, was exceedingly shaken. He was as startled as David could ever have wished. He read that contribution through to the place where it broke off at the dramatic word "Remorse," and decided to give the candidate nearly full marks. He was glad to do so, being a generous fellow, and grateful for some comic relief. That is how David, having answered no other question, scored eight out of a hundred, which is below the margin even of a History Special. And that, for in life one event perpetually ushers in another, is why he received a brief note from Mr. Bunn, rather an official little summons, expressing the satisfac-



tion it would afford that gentleman if Mr. David Manning would step across to his rooms between nine and ten. . . .

Mr. Bunn was determined to be friendly. If a note of sadness crept into his voice or gleaned in his eye, if he appeared perplexed about the future of anyone who appeared so indifferent to life's opportunities, if, in short, the door of hope was closed yet was not the door of repentance ajar. Certainly it was.

But to David his expression was ominous, not the air of a man leaping up to shout "A first, my dear fellow, a first, you brigand," which was the kind of thing dear to Mr. Bunn's exuberant nature. To David his round evangelical face, his chubby incredulous nose, his stricken eye, were as poignant as a blare of trumpets or a threnody. It was quite unnecessary for Mr. Bunn to remark, "This is the end of everything, my poor Manning, from now onwards you have ceased to exist." David knew it already.

Mr. Bunn coughed.

"I regret to inform you, Manning," he said, "that . . . in short you have failed."

Following upon that momentous utterance both David and Mr. Bunn stared wistfully out of the window. The college ducks, who lived their lives and took no thought for the morrow, perambulated slowly to the lake and flopped into the water.

Withdrawing his mournful gaze from a scene too pastoral for such a moment, Mr. Bunn threw out a last rope of distress. There were those floundering in deep waters who had snatched at it ere now and won to bishoprics. There were others who hadn't.

"I can, of course, advise you about coaching," he said more briskly; "the Vicar of Little Smailum is an old member of this college."

"I went to him last vac.," said David appalled

"Then there is Mr. Rogers."

"I went to him the vac. before."

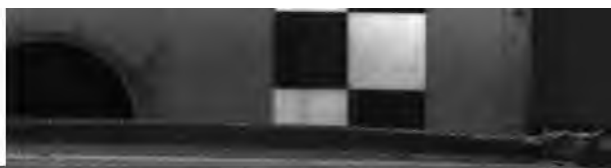
"Ah," said Mr. Bunn, and lapsed again into the far distance.

"Besides," remarked David brightening, "I don't want a degree specially."

To that astounding statement Mr. Bunn made no comment whatever. And so, at a slow and abject pace they crossed the room together and parted.

The education of David was complete. For twelve years he had come when the bell rang, dispersed when the hour struck, crammed by memory meaningless words gladly forgotten before another sun had set, crammed by dire necessity inane rhymes and phrases embodying, if properly adjusted, the rudiments of living prose. Throughout all those years costing so much, returning so little, he had never regarded those in authority as above the arid performance of their barren tasks. None had ever attempted to break down the barriers that bulk so largely, centuries old, between inspiration and the written word. They were like people, young and old together, turning over with dispassionate, tedious hands the ashes of some ancient fire; companions of the same sorrowful way, doomed to meet and, travelling a weary country together, part without regret or looking back.

It is not too much to say—for it is better said—that had David been herding cattle in some vacant wilderness he would have come more swiftly to the meaning of life, and of death. He would have read the hearts of men and known the deep soul of Nature; he would have grasped by hazardous ways the secrets of things hidden as yet, hidden it might be for always. He would, so lowly must one descend, have been a man, independent, carrying on the race; whereas this David took no hope of employment, was unskilled in craft or letters, was only a boy, only a bewildered boy, for all his one-and-twenty years.



II

He found the house in Grosvenor Square in the care of Mrs. Brookes, a cook who had married, and regretted the step ever since. Her husband was a policeman, and slept in the daytime. They occupied the basement of a mansion that had borne the legend "To Let" for many years, and was likely to continue to do so. It was always a mystery to Mrs. Brookes how the agents could expect a woman who had hung her pictures of the late Queen and "The Soldier's Return" to dig her own grave. She showed the house—she had to—but she could not be expected to warm to the subject. In her opinion it was *not* a good house, and, if encouraged to speak, as an honest woman she must admit it was damp, that the last people had died of consumption, that she had never actually *seen* a ghost, and only *heard* rats, but what made her seriously contemplate leaving sometimes—a threat still in abeyance—was a dislike for dry rot.

Mrs. Brookes, aroused from her afternoon sleep, came mournfully to the door, expressed a tempered pleasure at seeing David, "supposing he had not come to stay because the missus was gorn and the master gorn and the 'ouse in such a way" No, David was uncertain about his movements, but he thought he would go north that night. Considerably lowered in spirits he entered the vacant house, now swathed in sheets, walked through the familiar rooms, and sat for a few minutes in his own little study, which adjoined his bedroom. A few cricket and football groups upon the walls, a bat in a corner, old favourite Hentys, Conan Doyles, and Haggards on the bookshelf, a stuffed canary deeply loved long ago, a gramophone, a few photographs upon the mantelpiece. It was here, greatly daring, David had smoked his first cigar, stolen from his father's case; here he had given tea to Doris Haig, a piece of



David

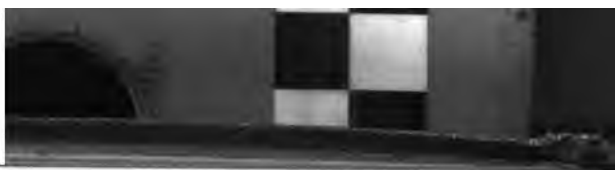
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intrepititude that rendered them both speechless and extraordinarily distant and precise; here he had spent many tedious lonely hours, his mother resting in her room, removed altogether from life or youth or happiness, his father at his office engrossed in his mysterious activities. There was not much to recall with either sentiment or sorrow in this room, in this house, or in his past. Nothing stood out and made him smile wistfully or laugh outright. No escapade on a Christmas night (for escapades are sociable affairs and merely gruesome or boring by oneself) no feud with brother or sister lit up by stealthy attacks at midnight; nothing but emptiness. All through his life something had been left out. Beyond the incidents of school and college he treasured no memories, no joy of looking back.

Sitting in the silent vacant room he decided that he would ring up a taxi, and call at the office. Perhaps his father might have left him a message. He might even be there. He could tell him about the exam. Get it off his chest. Then after dinner he would travel to Scotland by the midnight. The prospect gave him no pleasure. It simply faced him as the best (and only) course to take. Rising, he stared gravely at the books on the dusty shelf, glanced round the room, and, lighting a cigarette, returned to the hall and telephoned for a cab. Downstairs was absolute, stifling, silence. Mrs. Brookes was quite disinterested in his movements, or whether he went north or not. By dint of frequent meals, and oceans of rank tea, she had submerged all curiosity, affection, or loyalty. She, like her husband, the constable, had severed the brief channel that linked her with living energy, and was deeply, horribly asleep.

III

Martin Hughes, the private and confidential secretary of Francis Manning, sent a message down his



local telephone to say that Mr. David must be shown up instantly. From the waiting-room so "well appointed," to use the only proper tribute, David was escorted by an extremely sharp and promising office boy along the corridor to the lift where the right kind of sergeant, who had seen service in the best campaigns, saluted and rushed him up in the perfection of well-oiled and up-to-date elevators. Then thrusting back the door he stood to attention while David wished Miss Valda Schwann, Mr. Hughes' private and confidential secretary, a very good morning. Miss Schwann was not pretty, but she was absolutely efficient, quite flawless. Were there an address not mislaid but forgotten Miss Schwann indicated she knew it. Were there a word wanting, to give the final obscurity of meaning so vital in a business letter, Miss Schwann had it on the tip of her tongue. It was evident after a very brief acquaintance with Miss Schwann that a dash of Israel does not temper the wind for the shorn lamb. She was an undeveloped woman, scraggy, and birdlike, and she had, naturally enough, a mastering contempt for the morning fairness of Mr. Manning's son. They all had. Even the office boy spoke, with biting wit, of the day when he would perforce demonstrate to David the swift and the wasteful method of sticking stamps. Concerning David's twelve years of education he refrained from criticism: The higher type of office boy, who has attended evening classes, does not descend to the obvious in humour.

Miss Schwann conducted David through her room, in which every engine for condensing labour, speeding up, tabulation, annotating, filing, had each its appointed place, and where Miss Schwann's private and confidential typist never raised her eyes, but clicked in a kind of cool and assured frenzy.

"Please come in, Mr. David," said Martin Hughes, a short dark young man, snatched some ten years ago from a rival, and modelled upon Francis Manning

henceforth. "No, your father left three days ago—for Scotland. He is motoring north with Sir Price Pringle."

"Motoring!"

Martin Hughes permitted himself a little confidential aside.

"Between ourselves, Mr. David—business and pleasure. Mr. Manning said he would probably find you at Ardmore when they arrived."

"Yes," said David absently. "Yes, I expect so."

The secretary regarded him with keen secret eyes. He had never fathomed this Scottish business himself. There were gaps in the plans of Francis Manning he would give a lot to be able to bridge.

"It must have surprised you to hear your father had taken this place—so—er—suddenly."

Yes, David had only heard about it quite by chance.

"Especially when Mr. Manning is due in the States next month."

"In America?"

Mr. Hughes nodded. He was splendidly patient.

"And he has engagements in London in July, and he will be in Germany in August—he is always busy—constant rush."

David stared blankly at him. He had pictured his father as sitting hours upon end in his office seat. This headlong darting from place to place threw a new light on him. It breathed adventure.

"And when may we expect you here," asked Mr. Hughes, masking a creditable anxiety.

David started.

"Me—oh, I don't know—soon, I suppose."

"Unless you prefer a country life, or the army?"

He broke off at a loss for further contemptible callings, and after a moment's consideration, brushed aside the Church.

"I must think it over," said David.



"Of course," added Mr. Hughes with an eye on the clock, "I need not say——"

"Thank you, thanks very much."

Again David followed Miss Schwann to the lift, again the perfect sergeant shot down with him to the level of the street, once more the office boy looked him over, and watched the leisurely way David turned the corner. And even as he went, rather dejectedly, towards St. Paul's, the office had shaken him off, purged its memory, and hummed onward (every axle, every wheel, every nut, sound and durable) satisfied in routine magnificently covered with the minimum expenditure of time and energy; waging a daily bloodless warfare; crushing unseen by gradual pressure the feeble or the inadequate; crushing also itself in a process, which, like some ancient deity, inhuman, repellent, turns all its devotees to stone.

IV

It was turned seven when David met Charles Veriter passing quietly along the shady side of Pall Mall. At Cambridge Veriter had impressed them all enormously. His immaculate presence, his deliberate gestures, his air of assurance, were the pride of his college, and the constant irritation of the dons. Had he been stupid as well as indolent it would have been their happy duty to rusticate him, but Charles Veriter had mapped out his life at twelve and was living to scale. He did not permit an elegant indolence to set a trap about his feet. Such cool confidence fascinated David. They all said Charles Veriter would be in the Cabinet some day. No one pretended to believe he was brilliantly intellectual—that did not appear to matter. On the other hand, no one knew how splendidly mediocre he really was. Except Charles Veriter.

"My dear fellow," he said in his low agreeable voice, "I was thinking about you only last night. Come to my club and have a chat. Where are you dining?"

David had no idea.

"Then join me—it's early, but I have to rush back and change. That is delightful—what could be better."

In this pleasant spirit of concord, a spirit peculiarly associated with Veriter, they entered a club in Piccadilly, whose great vacant windows enable the members to stare with fine after-luncheon austerity upon the passing throng. The porter at the door brightened at the first glimpse of Veriter. Whether it was his air of decayed nobility, the restrained perfection of his clothes, his dark shadowy face—who can say? It is enough that the hall-porter, who had seen portentous service, and only spoke to Mr. Marrow the club butler on terms of any intimacy, smiled gently and then for fear of mistakes froze an approaching member with sudden ferocity.

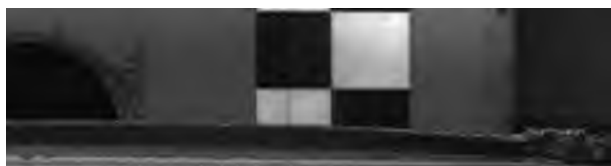
"Come along," said Veriter. "Wash—yes—down here—if you'll excuse me I'll just hunt up a bottle of wine—our claret's not bad." He turned away and running into an elderly man with a Government office profile, patted him soothingly on the arm, murmuring some little confidence, something he had heard very greatly to the other gentleman's credit, which he hoped was true.

"Yes," admitted the elderly person, crimson, and prancing towards a wash-basin, "quite true, but not a word, Charles, my boy."

Leaving this train of goodwill behind him Veriter walked composedly into the dining-room, was greeted with urbanity by the club butler, studied the wine list with great gravity and selected a table.

"And now, my dear fellow—tell me all about yourself," he said. "How's Cambridge—still the same old place?"

"I've come a cropper over my History Special," replied David. "I expect the Gov'nor'll be jolly fed up."



"Why," asked Veriter, lifting his eyelids. "From what I hear your father is making a big name nowadays."

"My father," echoed David.

Charles Veriter regarded him smilingly.

"For my sins," he said, as though in explanation, "I'm private secretary to Lord Wigan—Jenkins the coal owner—uneducated—extraordinary old boy. I write his speeches, answer his letters, take the edge off his dinners, and—well I'm engaged to his only daughter. That may surprise you, Manning, but it's not so crude as it sounds. Muriel plays the game." He sipped his wine reflectively.

"Old Wigan was speaking about your father the other night—swore like a bargee about him—jealousy of the House of Lords for upstarts." He laughed softly. The thought of his future father-in-law was a continual joy.

"I don't know what to do," said David dismally.

"Do—work, eh?"

"Yes."

"But what about your father's business—hasn't he a business?"

"I don't like the idea. I was there to-day. It made me feel blue."

Charles Veriter nodded. He understood.

"Great thing in life," he explained deliberately, "is to keep your eye skinned. Get in with the right people. There are so many soft jobs running about—clerkships in Government offices, private secretaryships—all that line. People pass 'em on. And one thing leads to another. It's a ring. Jolly good thing too."

He reflected again.

"When I came down I didn't rush about. I was no more fitted for business than you are. But I belonged to two or three decent clubs, knew heaps of fellows, put in a word now and then. Jenkins—Lord Wigan, you know—turned up. Introduced to him by Wilfred

Montgomery, Trinity man. The old boy wanted showing round. When he came up he was covered with coal dust—now you'd think he dated from the Conquest. Commerce damned funny thing, isn't it? A fellow works his way up—then suddenly buys a peerage and works his way down again. New wine—old bottles—what?"

"You see," said David, "if I don't go into the business I'm at a loose end. I know no one like you. I haven't any brain."

"The great thing," repeated Veriter with solemnity, "is to keep in with the right people—*coming* people. Ask your father if those ar'n't words worth a pile of gold! The people in the know herd together. One chucks you on to another. Once in the centre of the crowd and you find yourself unable to fall out. It is the same in every country, every town, every college—you know what I mean—*people who count*. But in London they run the whole show. And the inner circle of Parliament is like a family party, or a syndicate for finding lucrative jobs. It's all so easy once you know the ropes. Of course you have to get there."

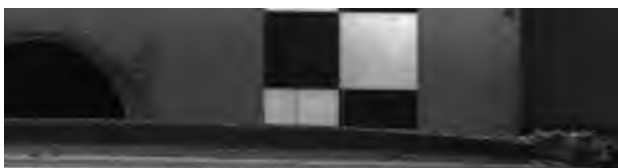
"My father is travelling to Scotland with Sir Price Pringle," went on David, "and there is an editor, Robert Steep."

"Robert Fenton Steep," echoed Veriter with a sharp look, "the editor of the 'Courier'—Radical paper—hard up—I know."

Then he was silent gathering up the threads. Francis Manning was evidently flying high.

"Look here, Manning," he said, "when can we meet again. It's like old times to see you. Drop me a line when you come south, will you? In the meanwhile I'll look out, shall I? Send round the word, eh?"

He paid the bill and walked thoughtfully after David.



CHAPTER V

IONA'S BIRTHDAY

I

THE afternoon Sir Joseph Preston came to Inverclover was cold and full of rain. The brow of Calder was hidden in a belt of cloud, and a hollow wind went crying down the corries of Drumcairn.

In the sombre drawing-room of Garroch the fire-light touched with trembling fingers the portraits on the neighbouring walls, and posted, in single fugitive rays, yellow hostages of light in the deepening darkness. Throughout that room dwelt at this hour of twilight a peculiar and saddening vigil as though at the passing of another day, where so many days had passed, inanimate things were moved by human tragedies. In the Jacobean cabinet against the wall gleamed, whitely fragile, china out of which dead lips had drunk two hundred years ago. Upon the sere and yellow keys of a spinet, long since disused, that still maintained its ancient post near the shuttered window, dead fingers, supple and white, had played upon a summer's day. Upon the smooth oak chair beside the great fireplace had rested who can say how many generations of Grahames, now gathered into darkness as day was even then speeding into night. Each thing within that gaunt and saddening room held its own irreplaceable associations reminding the thoughtful, as might a fugitive bowl in the streets of Pompeii, of the pathos of all human life. And in the deepening shadows that haunted the corner beyond the fireplace sat Miss Chris-



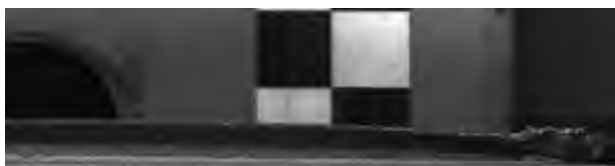
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tina, as the spirit of the place might hold its timeless court. Throughout the day she was too busied to enjoy the pastimes of southern women. She read little, cared nothing for calling or receiving callers, took small heed of the newspapers, believing nothing that was recorded, and had lived all her days like one keeping watch for some great opportunity when her reserves of courage, strength, and determination might stem the flood or carry an impregnable city. Sitting there absolutely still, for Miss Christina could never tolerate fidgeting, mental, or physical, she was as a tragic queen upon whose door the sullen blows of a victorious enemy were ringing throughout the house. Her eyes staring calmly upon the fire, her lips clenched, her fine strong hands resting upon the carved oaken arms of her chair, who can say what thoughts, stern or tender, were passing through that dauntless, simple, infinitely kindly mind.

II

That Sir Joseph Preston, the eminent specialist, was a very prosperous and distinguished person went without saying. He was famous for so many things beyond the limits of his profession. For his grey top hat, his white spats, his buttonhole—little happy accessories like these. But also for his genial ruddy face, his gift of story telling, and his jolly melodious laugh. Sir Joseph was a tonic in himself. "You're not ill," he would shout, "you're shamming, you dog—you'll live to be a hundred—ha, ha, ha," which though perfectly true might without the accompaniment of prods and winks have caused the patient the deepest indignation. But Sir Joseph was not a fool. His jocosity was a professional diploma not an offence. He could be as gentle and sympathetic as a woman, being a tender-hearted man, and greatly beloved. At the same time it was notorious that the younger school of the profession sneered at him as the triumph of a bed-



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side manner. Let it therefore be said in his defence (and not his alone) that a little skill is well enough but what is best of all is a kind hand across the rough places.

It was all in line with his smooth and cordial temperament to support a patient's views were they in any way reasonable. There are doctors who must always show how independent and clever they are, so that if a patient begs to be allowed to go to Cannes they instantly look thunder and reply "Mentone." Sir Joseph had no belief in that kind of autocracy. Half the battle was to buttress the patient's vacillating strength. Sir Joseph carried this lovable trait into his social life and into that outer ring who wait in halls, drawing-rooms and gardens for the doctor's verdict. Instead of coming out of the sick-room like an undertaker, Sir Joseph (whatever his private opinion) would demand to know why he had been called in—what right had they to worry a busy man like this, making him miss his luncheon—a dozen little tricks to bring a ray of hope that might—who could tell—not be in vain. The result was, the relatives instead of re-entering the sick-room with that resolute cheerfulness so chilling to a patient would become like a party of Sir Joseph's, enriching the whole atmosphere with buoyancy. . . .

Leaving Iona's room the distinguished specialist paused upon the corridor, shutting the door behind him. He had known Iona since she was a new-born baby, he had attended her poor mother. Every few months he visited Garroch, and every visit brought the smile less readily to his face.

As he walked slowly away the deerhound met him in the passage, and reaching his mistress' door lay down, its long muzzle resting between its paws.

Sir Joseph passed on and so downstairs. In the hall he stopped again and beckoned to Hamish.

"Might I see Mr. Grahame?" he asked.



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"It's Miss Christina ye're to see, Sir Joseph—she's doon in the drawing-room."

"She's well, I hope."

"Finely, Sir Joseph."

"I'll warrant she'll outlive us, Hamish," said Sir Joseph humoursomely.

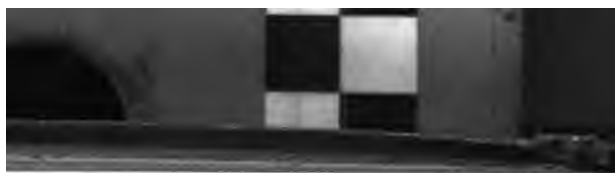
"Aye, sir," he paused, "an' maybe some besides," he added, shaking his head and walking along the corridor.

Sir Joseph had not been prepared for this interview. It was one thing to soothe and hearten the Laird, but quite another to skirmish with Miss Christina. She was one of those silent watching women, before whose impenetrable patience the childlike artifices of evasion are numbed and broken. Opposition would, of course, be imbecile, duplicity was vain. There only remained what people called his "gran' Edinburgh manner."

He entered the room with abundant cordiality and good spirits, shook hands warmly with Miss Christina, rubbed them together noisily and remarked, "This is a pleasure—a real pleasure"—with a little confirmatory bend of his head.

Miss Christina made no comment whatever. She simply regarded him attentively, gravely, with melancholy grandeur. People coming in from the outer world upon Miss Christina would often enough speak as the southerners do, in high courageous flippancy scheming to draw her out. But no one ever drew Miss Christina out. It was she who drew them in. After a while, overawed by that unbending queenly figure sitting erect in a black chair, by that fine composed face with the clear steady blue eyes under the lined white forehead—words faltered, and the weaker sort grew incoherent and speechless.

It is quite probable that Miss Christina did not appreciate the source from whence her power arose, nor is it even likely she considered the matter at all, having a traditional contempt for "chatterers." But in her, as in all strong dauntless characters, the gift of silence



was the despair of frailer minds. It was the rock which withstood, in a fine solitude, the raging or caresses of a hundred seas. . . .

"I thought if I saw you——" she began quietly.

Sir Joseph raised his hands from his knees and extended them just as though he would not hear another word.

"My dear Miss Macdougall—how curious—how very curious. Just what I was on the point of saying."

"I think," pursued Miss Christina, "that it would be wise to have a talk."

"There is nothing," broke in Sir Joseph, "that could be better. Nothing. Indeed I was on the point——"

"It would be a pity were Mr. Grahame——"

But at those words Sir Joseph's satisfaction appeared to overwhelm him. He rose and walking to the fireplace (which afforded him an opportunity to command Miss Christina, as it were) clasped his hands behind his back and bending forward said very confidentially:

"*Most* injudicious—Miss Macdougall—*most* injudicious. I would not hear of it—on no account." Looking exceedingly threatening, Sir Joseph shook his jowl and again inclining himself remarked with a fine sincerity:

"A professional man, Miss Macdougall, must be prepared to make a stand. He may be wrong—on the other hand, he may be right. That's the point—may be right. There is the patient—that is his first care. But there is his duty to the nearest and er—dearest. I am glad you agree with me—I think we quite understand each other."

Having uttered this sentiment with extraordinary emphasis and deliberation he buttoned his coat, smiled splendidly and would in another moment have reached the door.

But Miss Christina was speaking, and with a slight shrinkage of composure Sir Joseph halted and assumed



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the intent preoccupation of a man who is recovering from a moment of emotion.

"I was saying, Sir Joseph, it would be a pity were Mr. Grahame alarmed—unduly. He is an old man and the shock would be more than he could stand. Iona is his only child. He has no notion that she is so ill. Is there any reason why he should be told?"

Sir Joseph, staring very hard at the portrait of Colonel John, turned with fresh impetus.

"But my dear Miss Macdougall, my dear lady, what a doleful strain. Whatever can make you speak so—so despondently?"

Miss Christina had relapsed into her vast silence. Sir Joseph drew his chair closer to hers. He leant forward and placing the fingers of his hands together spoke gently, carefully.

"Every medical man must be prepared for some discouragement in certain cases of constitutional weakness," he said. "You follow me! Well, let us be frank. Nature may reassert herself at the lowest ebb—or, again, collapse may ensue. I am speaking in general terms, not of any particular instance. A case is often to the inexperienced eye sinking daily when in reality Nature, assisted by science, is already at work. We must be brave, patient, optimistic."

Miss Christina regarded him with steady eyes.

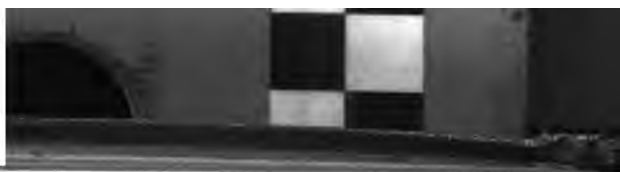
"Is that what you will say to my brother-in-law?" she asked, "because, Sir Joseph, he is a man carrying a heavy burden these days. Weigh your words or worse will follow, and should anything come to him, Iona would slip through our fingers."

He made a little empty gesture, and shook his head.

"What can we do but hope?" he pleaded. "The girl lacks vitality, reserve force, will to live. This house—pardon me if I am frank—this house is dispiriting to youth. It is full of saddening associations, it must overshadow any sensitive creature."

"What is to be done?" asked Miss Christina bluntly.

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"Done—how can I say? Iona went away but she is no stronger. She does not appear to have met any young people. Miss Jean——" He became of a sudden discomposed.

"Is old—you mean is old. We are all old. Is that it?"

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly. "That's it—but I speak only in general terms, I make no definite statement. I only say it is a pity. The will to live—that is a greater force than all the medicines in the world."

"Iona is eighteen," said Miss Christina.

"One would think she were much younger."

"She lives in a dream, in the past. We all live in the past, I'm afraid."

"That is easily remedied."

"Not so easily, Sir Joseph."

"The world is full of youth, sunshine, happiness, the world that lies outside Garroch beyond the pass of Gartleg—beyond the mountains."

He smiled at the sentiment, and rose to his feet.

"Aye," repeated Miss Christina sadly, "beyond the mountains."

III

To hold aloof with any satisfaction to oneself requires undisputed money or great eminence. Preferably a happy interrelation of the two. James Grahame, like many other children of pathos and tragedy, tempted the profane. He was tenth laird of Garroch—there the matter ended. It was therefore inevitable that, in a world not ruled by compassion, there should be some who frankly and violently derided the strange unforgettable figure, moving so remotely, with such quaint pageantry, in a world long since passed into history. He was easy game for the disjointed reflections of Duncan Ewing-Dunn, who harboured a deep mortification under an air of bluff and noisy derision. The pitiful inadequacy of



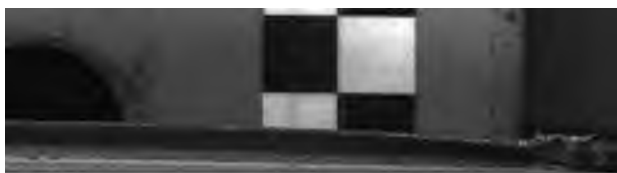
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the Laird's claims to withstand the modern spirit, enabled Archie Saunders, the sceptic of Inverclover (and a most unsuccessful grocer) to sharpen his thin bitter wits. He enjoyed all the triumph of some yelping scavenger shadowing the hesitant footprints of a senile lion.

The tall, stooping figure of the Laird, his pointed beard, his fine head of silver hair, the narrow face and keen blue eyes, above all the air of indestructible permanence, seemed to aggravate and incense certain types of mind almost to madness. They hungered to do away with something that hardly existed. Like persons rushing with axes at a falling oak. It was as though while James Grahame went dreaming about Inverclover, blind to his own penury, ignoring the future rather obviously—the spirit of race, tradition, conservatism, contented leisure, would survive and even flourish. Such things were, except under adroit circumstances, abhorrent to the Radicalism of a Ewing-Dunn and the Socialism of an Archie Saunders. To such as these the Laird was a living argument against any belief in the creed he stood for. Put that way James Grahame came off rather badly. Archie Saunders, who was a man of striving, remorseless logic, and had a dozen thumbed text-books on sociology, philosophy, and free thought, could dispose of him so thoroughly that to any unprejudiced person the Laird was practically extinct. Duncan Ewing-Dunn, who had no books, was more sweeping. He could not advance so simply into the open. He was, for instance, always very grateful for his uncle Pat who had been a drunken village schoolmaster and was now “my Uncle Patrick, a very distinguished mathematician.” Uncle Pat was like a rock in a solitary place.

“Mind you,” Ewing-Dunn would say, removing the cigar from his mouth, “I’m not a damned anarchist who sees red just because a fellow’s never done a hand’s turn. I’m only amused at the old boy—*amused*,



you understand. Picture of fun—thinks he's God Almighty. Touched here. Never seen him? Ask my wife then. She says he's a Vanderbilt, is it—peaked beard and all that—like some Johnny in history. Like his own ancestor, ha, ha—that's good—must tell that to Jane. When I met him to buy a slice of his land it was like a scene—you know—on the stage. Could hardly keep my face straight. Clings to every inch like a dog to a bone. Miserly or broke—bit of both I expect. Won't last long. Pity, of course—old associations and all that, but—glass of port, old chap—Cockburn. Paid a pot for it, but it's *sound stuff*. Have a cigar?" . . .

James Grahame had drawn in a small table to his fireside, and from a large tin box was pulling out papers, deeds, agreements and the like, staring at them one after the other with a kind of dignified bewilderment. Beside his chair a retriever, old and grey muzzled, sat and blinked at the crackling logs, occasionally glancing in the endearing manner of trusted dogs into his master's face. The room was long and shadowy as a place of books should be, and towards the far end a flight of steps led to a recess suitable for deep chests to carry family documents and the like.

There were books, finely musty, on the shelves, there were ancient prints upon the walls. But from there chaos commenced, and as no servant was permitted to enter that part of the house, and it was rumoured that to save labour the Laird kept his fire burning for years on end, dust and wreckage took matters into their tender hands. His love for old books, old pictures, relics of the romance of history, was so deep that the library was littered with chairs of various periods, stools, wooden tea caddies, brass candlesticks, targes, guns and what not, while out of sight, buried for years—where generations of mice had brought up thriving families—bulked hugely vague distorted tumuli. This wilderness of plenty through which one trod delicately or slipped to



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rise no more, gave the Laird a very real joy. For an antiquary in the heart of a hard winter to be able to dig, as it were, in his own room (alone and not hide-bound by meals), and furthermore to reveal a handsome silver-mounted pistol, long since forgotten, or a piece of exquisite china happily only slightly cracked, was, with a warm and generous fire, unalloyed and harmless happiness. . . .

With the aid of a small blunt pencil the Laird jotted down some figures, added them up, and shook his head. The deeper he dived into the tin box the larger grew his depression, until, at last, in a kind of tragic challenge to an overwhelming fate, he crammed the papers back, shut the thing and pushed it away. It was beyond him—it had always been beyond him. These questions of figures, rents, dilapidations, falling values—all this was very obscure and hotly resented. He wanted to be left alone—not to think of these things. But always after a time they closed about him again, shut him in; some brief letter about his balance, a bill for repairs to his outhouses, some tenant gone bankrupt, all manner of insidious little attacks upon an estate sadly shaken and mishandled.

Within the last few years things weighed on him more, and there was small comfort in the thought that old age carries burdens less briskly than youth. That was half the trouble. There was Iona grown to the threshold of womanhood, under the shadow of ill-health, there were his sisters-in-law whom he fondly imagined would be like little children without the firm hand of a man. There was Garroch sinking, always sinking, deeper like an ancient ship taking in water at a score of leaks. And upon the bridge only a man past seventy, sighting no harbourage upon the far horizon. . . .

He rose and pacing tediously to the fire gloomed into the dancing flames, and the thought of Iona, eighteen to-day, wrung his heart with empty despair. Ways



and means, ways and means, they shadowed his days and haunted his sleepless nights. They were like strong irreverent fists battering at the last sanctuary of a fallen race.

A knock sounded at the door.

A moment and Sir Joseph Preston was standing on the threshold.

IV

When the doctor had gone James Grahame glanced at his watch and passing slowly across the floor went along the narrow corridor and into his bedroom. It was similar to his library in the respect that it acted as an overflow room, particularly for books. Sheila, who regarded the Laird's eccentricities as the hall-mark of good breeding, was permitted to attend to this room so long as she took a heed to where she placed her feet. After an interval he returned to the library in evening clothes—which in itself spelt in the life of that vague and solitary man a great occasion—carrying a dusty bottle of claret, which he placed before the fire. Then, drawing the curtains, he went out upon the passage at the head of the stairs and blew a whistle that hung there upon a string. That was his line of communication with the underworld. In the same grave fashion he drew a table within range of the fire, laid upon it a white cloth, and took two chairs from a corner of the room, setting them facing each other, one upon either side. That concluded, he stood back a little and thinking of something the doctor had said frowned a little and then as swiftly smiled. The old dog, rising stiffly, walked towards the table and looking backward whined and waved his tail with the vague sympathy of one lonely creature for another.

Footsteps sounded upon the corridor, and Sheila crossed the threshold and laid the table. But to her the Laird said never a word.



Iona's Birthday

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And in the quietness of that evening hour Iona came and stood in the doorway in a yellow gown, with a red rose at her breast. He uttered a welcoming word when he saw her, kissed her fondly and closing the door set her in the chair nearest to the fire.

"It is not every day we are eighteen," he said.

She raised her eyes and looked searchingly into his. In her father's voice was no note of strain, no indication that he was playing a part. Yet he must know. . . . It was impossible but he must know.

She turned and faced the room so loaded with lost hope and brave appearances. She watched her father hovering about Sheila as she carried in the dishes of their solitary meal. Downstairs her aunts were at dinner with Sir Joseph. She wondered whether they would speak about trivial things until Hamish had left the room. Upon the closing of the door, she could hear in her mind the low murmur of voices, solemn, ominous, speaking about herself. Perhaps that was why her father had asked her to a birthday festivity in his own room. Perhaps they were all doing their best, thinking of her. . . .

Her father met her watchful eyes smilingly—just as though he had not a care in the world. And all the time she was seeing again the anxious gravity that crept into Sir Joseph's face, leaving him for a moment off his guard, looking upon the floor, his stethoscope dangling between his fingers.

"I met John Parish the day. He wore a kind of glum look."

She assented absently, her thoughts full of other things.

"I said, 'What's all this talk of your sister, Parish?' He said, 'She is coming—coming on Saturday, was it—widow from Glasgow way.'"

"Mrs. Lamont."

"That was the name. Poor Parish—a bachelor takes ill to hospitalities like these."



He broke off and when she made no comment added, "I hear he is planning great things for the Manse. Alexander Macdonald is quite upset."

She lifted a dessert fork and laid it down again.

"Is Mr. Parish preparing for his sister's arrival," she asked without looking at him.

Her father tweaked his fine nose, and made a little airy gesture with his fingers.

"He is one of those slow-running Lowland streams," he said; "they are deeper than they seem."

"It couldn't be that he had anything else in his mind, Father?"

"Heaven help me, Iona, I'm no a judge of a minister's intentions."

But she only looked thoughtfully upon her empty plate.

And so at last the moment had come for drinking Iona's health. The old man with a pathetic little bow towards her raised his glass. "To your birthday, child," he said, "to the memory of your eighteen years. May you live so long that you will think kindly of your father as one remembers far-off things. May you find the greatest thing in life, Iona, and hold it even for a while."

He paused a moment, then said, like a man crying hail and farewell.

"I give you the Past."

She drank slowly, pondering on the words. Suddenly with the courage of youth and as it were a challenge, she spoke.

"I give you the days to come."

James Grahame made several times as though he would interrupt her. But quite quietly Iona told him her fears, the warning of her own frail body, the fact that Sir Joseph had sat long with Aunt Christina. To a man younger or less ruled by ancient, inviolate beliefs some shadow—were it but a cloud upon the hori-

zon—would have gathered and remained, taking shape, blackening the sky. Instead of which he was waiting, poised, eager to tell her, to soothe her, listening with a sore heart to her dread that something was being kept back, the old incessant fear of the sick.

"Supposing, Father, I had to go away, as ill people do, as my mother did——"

A curious urgent flame awoke in his eyes at those words. Some old memory smouldering. Regret and passion stirring as always in the heart of the Gael.

"Listen," he said, "you say your mother went abroad. Against all my urging she turned a deaf ear. She was a child and I was middle-aged—but let that bide. She went from Garroch and what happened? She never looked up again. When she returned—she came to die." The bitterness of it all gloomed once again in his drawn face, in his fidgeting hands. It was as though Garroch had been slighted and Garroch had triumphed at last.

"Father," she cried softly, "I should not have reminded you but I was afraid perhaps I might be ordered away. Was not my mother sent by the doctor?"

"By Sir Joseph—yes."

"Then I—he did not say anything about me?"

"My little Iona," he replied gently, "of course that was why he came. But you are not your mother, poor woman." He paused, then continued, stroking her hand tenderly, "he said many things a doctor is compelled to say. That you need nourishment, cheering-up, change of scene. I heard him out. I heard him out seventeen years ago. Tell me, Iona—how would you like to journey right away—hear me, girl, into the sun—to the south. How would you like to see fresh faces, new places?" He watched all the time he spoke with burning intent eyes. Her hand trembled in his, but no words passed her lips. With an effort he continued:



"Don't be frightened by what I said about your mother. That was different—quite different."

"Would you come too, Father?"

"He said the old are hard on the young, Iona—and he was right. Old houses, old ways, old people. Were you to leave us for a space it would be better—you understand—alone."

She raised her mournful eyes to his.

"He does not know," she said. "How can he?"

"Know what?"

"That I could never leave Garroch—like that."

He had bent forward to catch her words uttered so quietly. For a moment he still remained, as it were, crouching before the fire, joy and some deeper emotion contending for mastery. Then with a high laugh he scrambled upwards.

"I knew it—I knew it fine," he cried gladly. "I as good as told him he was talking like an old wife. And he admitted it, lassie—he caved in before he left this room. I said where was the like o' Garroch—what kind of gallivanting creature did he take ye for? I asked him what kind of grand cure he had found for your mother with his up-to-date notions. I asked him did he know the Grahames had breathed out their three score years and ten in Garroch and never an untimely death since my great-uncle fell at Quatre Bras."

"And what did he reply, Father?"

The old man halted and brooded over this.

"Reply," he said sharply, "he had no reply. He said a man must do his duty, but circumstances alter cases."

"So he doesn't really think I am so poorly."

The Laird swelled in the magnificence of the triumph of Garroch, and his own great common sense.

"Would I be in such spirits," said he, "were you ailing. Tuts, lassie—let us share a glass of claret and to-morrow ask Aunt Christina whether I'm the doited old man you think me."



Iona's Birthday

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"It was only——" she began, then as though she knew her thoughts for idle fears, she drew down his face and kissed him, her bare white arms around his neck.

The fire went leaping and roaring up the chimney, making Calder, the old dog, draw back and blink his eyes.

"Come," he said fondly and drew her into the great chair so that her head rested on his shoulder, and the soft yellow light flickered upon their faces. Suddenly, thinking of other days and other winter nights, she said in a whisper: "Tell me a story, please," just as she used to long ago. At those familiar words the present sped away like smoke, and all that remained was an old man talking in the firelight. There did their lives begin and end, and if, in other years, ghosts haunt the room in the tower, kindly eyes may chance to see, in the gloaming, an ancient gentleman seated before a deserted hearth, and upon his knee a little girl, dressed in an old-fashioned gown with a gold band around her hair.



CHAPTER VI

ANNIE LAMONT

I

IT was dusk, and as Mrs. Lamont had arranged her departure for Inverclover on the morrow she had many things upon her mind. She sat, in an old-fashioned black dress, smelling disturbingly of naphthalene, her hair parted in the centre and turning grey, her pallorous face like a mask of abiding melancholy, a piece of paper in her hand and upon it several neat jottings.

Newtown is not a cheerful place, but it suited Mrs. Lamont. To her husband the late Rev. Angus Lamont, a man temperamentally anxious to be frolicsome, it had given a chronic cold in the head, and occasional fits not of majestic melancholy but of petty irritation. He was affected by continual bad weather and damp, and, having to hold jurisdiction over meetings held in hot halls at unfortunate hours, was apt to contract chills upon the liver.

For twenty years the Lamonts had lived at No. 144 Winter Crescent, a house in a terrace of such enormous length that upon a weary September afternoon under incessant rain the fanciful might have wondered whether it spanned the world. Newtown had a weakness for railings, and to Mrs. Lamont they had long become indispensable. Sitting there with her notes upon the train service, she wondered sadly when she would see the rain gleaming upon the railings again. There were railings along the front on a level with the



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pavement—thus ensuring the seclusion of ten square feet of wretched grass—there were railings to dirty your hand up to the front door. Then upon the first landing opposite to where Mrs. Lamont was sitting there was a balcony, and here again, as a protection one can only suppose to impetuous or depressed tenants, there was a further barricade of these dejected iron bars. Newtown worthies were born, lived, and were buried within the sanctity of railings. Newtown churches are notorious for railings, and even a stranger could pick out a Newtown cemetery in the dark with its drenched and railinged dead.

Mrs. Lamont was seated in the drawing-room, a room that meant a great deal to her and for that reason has its importance. It was a leading characteristic of Annie Lamont's that she never parted with any letter, book, umbrella, sideboard, or four-poster that carried with it associations of persons, perhaps not greatly beloved in lifetime, but the source of many pensive hours after death. She could point them out, these little or cumbrous relics, until under her resigned reminiscences the past not merely drew very near but stood out like an adjoining graveyard.

The drawing-room was full of such things, while upon the mantel-piece, upon the piano, upon occasional tables, upon the wall, upon the tops of bookcases were photographs of relatives singly and in groups. Some (the younger ones) were still sneaking about, but these were never mentioned or brushed pensively aside.

At seven o'clock Mrs. Lamont passed downstairs and into the dining-room. At seven-thirty she was back again sitting before the window, a shawl over her shoulders, a white cat on her lap. It was, although none knew it and none cared, Mrs. Lamont's farewell to Newtown just as knights of old kept vigil on the eve of some great adventure. . . . At ten she rose and stood at the window gazing—it might be for the last time—upon the drenched and deserted street. There was no gran-



deur in the moment, only a lonely little body feeling desperately uneasy and yet with the courage of women accepting what must be, in silence. And unseen, unpitied, from far-off streets and miserable hovels, horses were stumbling between the shafts, and harness was being buckled over weary backs, men with heavy eyes and dripping coats were dragging tired limbs upon soaked boxes, all over Newtown lights were twinkling along rain-driven streets until they united one with another like pilgrims of the night, and rattled in mute procession down Winter Crescent towards the Macniven Hall.

Mrs. Lamont watched them pass, and, turning, went slowly over the faded carpet.

At the door she paused and looked back. . . .

II

Mrs. Lamont arrived at Newtown station with what she used to call "time in hand," and with her was her friend Miss Jane Douglas, carrying in Christian hands small paper parcels of ham sandwiches, a "cookie" (or sustaining bun), a bottle of milk unshielded from curious eyes because of Mrs. Lamont's position in Newtown and the kind of things people say if only they can find a shadow of excuse. Mrs. Lamont, having paid the cabman his legal fare, moved quickly into the inner recesses of the station accompanied by a mountain of luggage, together with a suspicious-looking wicker basket which Miss Douglas, casting a look full of understanding at Mrs. Lamont, withdrew from the barrow, and added to the multitude of her other packages. There was twenty-five minutes, but what is twenty-five minutes? Mrs. Lamont who, in her resignation and apparel, might have borne the mourning of an entire nation, counted, together with Miss Jane, the trunks, the boxes, and larger brown paper parcels for the third time that morning. One could not be too



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careful considering everything, and a box might have tumbled off the back of the cab. . . . Reassured, the barrow creaked along the empty platform, and here she and Miss Jane parted, according to a scheme carefully discussed the day before. Miss Jane, clinging the closer to the wicker basket (in which the white cat rocked upon its attenuated haunches), to the milk-jug, to the sandwiches, the bananas (ready peeled and in rice paper), the paper brought from No. 144 Winter Crescent, and a dozen other trifles, accompanied the porter on to the platform, where with the air of Stanley sighting Livingstone she was shortly hailed by Mrs. Lamont.

"Better leave a corner seat disengaged, Jane," she said. "I should not like to travel *quite* alone."

As it happened, however, there was no occasion for any uneasiness on that account, the carriage being entirely occupied by an abstracted schoolmistress accompanied by a company of excited girls, who, during the two hours after departure, giggled and blew their noses and jumped up and down, exhibiting all the symptoms of youth so deeply resented by persons of maturity.

Finally (and to the secret relief of everybody concerned) the train moved jerkily out of the platform and Mrs. Lamont, closing the window, gripped her umbrella in one hand, assured herself that her ticket had not melted or mouldered, or vanished from within her purse, whispered some encouraging words to "Snow" the white cat, thus setting the school girls on tenterhooks, and from that moment to her arrival at the place where she changed, remained with her eyes fixed upon the far horizon, her lips pursed, like a statue of Patience surveying with resignation the disappearance of civilisation.

After an enormous stretch of time devoted so far as she could observe to plunging into the heart of forbidding mountains, crawling how slowly over frail



bridges beneath which torrents of amber water were falling to some invisible abyss, climbing with terrific and laboured panting to the summit, one could only suppose, of Ben Nevis, and running helter skelter down the other side—it was a relief to them all when the train drew up at a junction and a porter yelled with extraordinary ferocity, from one far distance to another, “Pittendreich, change for Appendreoch, Swandour and the North.”

III

David Manning, together with Snuff, his fox terrier, a dog greatly gifted, golf clubs, fishing rods, and baggage was also heading for Inverclover. For the last two hours he had, in the fastness of a first-class carriage, eyed, with dying hope, a short inaccessible man very anxious to avoid genial pleasantries. Once only did the short traveller look up, when he regarded Snuff (yelping with boredom) in a lethal abstraction. At which Snuff, ever one of your optimists, jumped upon the carriage cushions, cocked his ears and burrowed for an imaginary rat.

“Really,” exclaimed the little gentleman petulantly.

That was all the conversation that passed. And so with the natural dread of a man that he may lose the use of his mother-tongue in foreign parts, David alighted upon the junction of Pittendreich, and took no thought of the firsts to Inverclover, of which there were no less than three forbidding carriages. Instead he came to the assistance of a harassed matron overwhelmed by parcels and children, persisted in accompanying the little party over the bridge, and was exchanging and listening to the most intimate domestic confidences, when they reached the local train for Inverclover. Mrs. Lamont had seen them afar, and was considerably alarmed, being at a loss with children. For a moment they seemed bent upon entering the



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train higher up. Every traveller knows how hope rises at such times, so often swiftly to sink into the darkest despair. It was David who checked the scurrying company. He hardly noticed the diminutive presence of Mrs. Lamont. He never gave her a thought. He opened the door noisily, and overtaken by a sudden panic because the engine-driver, worthy man, was relighting his pipe, the whole party rushed tumultuously for safety, overthrowing a boy of four who set Snuff barking, and ramming securely into the carriage entrance a large mysterious basket covered with a shawl. Against this they battered in vain. It was not until David had clambered over it that he could clear the passage and lift up children as one might handle bags of meal. And all the time he said "There we are—plenty of time, Mrs. Mackay—plenty of time. Take it easily." But Mrs. Mackay was one of those stout short-winded women to whom calmness is denied. She could not be at peace until they were all safely seated, and then she would not be at peace until they were all safely out again. There may have been five children or there may have been more. After a certain number within a certain age even a parent is sometimes at a loss. But to Mrs. Lamont, poor woman, there were hundreds. To her the carriage contained all the children in Scotland, to say nothing about the strange young man with his dog, and the multitude of parcels, many of them exposing their contents, string bags laden with fragrant vegetables and fish.

To her it was additionally silly of an elderly clergyman in large spectacles to haunt the closed door staring furtively in. Surely the rest of the train could not be full? Indeed it wasn't. But the elderly clergyman, very shabbily attired, persisted. He opened the door and got in. There was about ten inches in the corner opposite the matron. He gave them all a little faded timid smile and sat down. Then, in the same grave way, he pinched the ruddy cheek of the boy upon his

mother's knee, and receiving no encouragement hastily opened a "Scotsman" and disappeared behind.

Presently when shadows were massing like battalions in the drenched Pittendreich Woods, and when, under a bleak heaven, the air was clear and cold and laden with the sweetness of a thousand leagues of heather, the guard, white bearded, red-cheeked, having concluded a rambling anecdote with a shepherd a hundred yards across the Moor, trudged along the platform, waved his arm, and with reluctant jerks the train pulled out of Pittendreich, and wound like a decrepit snake through the dark forest trees that lie as a garment about the flanks of Calder.

No sooner had the train started than David plunged into his pockets and produced some Peter's chocolate. He not merely produced it—he made it disappear, and discovered it in the baby's hair—he found a piece in Snuff's collar (causing him the greatest mortification), and even ventured upon inspecting the minister's round hat. Finally, before presenting a piece all round he made Snuff, who was a very accomplished and genial dog, achieve some feats that, in a rocking Inverclover train, were in themselves marvels of skill and dexterity.

Encouraged by these exploits David glanced at Mrs. Lamont, who smiled in her shrinking way and then looked hurriedly out of the window.

But the elderly clergyman was entranced. He fidgeted and smiled nervously. He looked like a man persuading his conscience to take a doze.

"This," said David at last, "is my last trick—positively my last appearance. It is an imitation of a farmyard." He paused, and at those familiar words nodding heads were raised, and the little clergyman gave him one steady critical look over the top of his paper.

"The moon has gone," began David dramatically, "and there is a grey light in the west. Now listen," and suddenly somewhere in the carriage there rose the



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long-drawn crow of a cock, answered at an infinite distance by another cock. The air was full of cocks and Snuff was beside himself.

Mrs. Lamont unbent in spite of herself, and the elderly clergyman nodded his head, but gravely, and laid down his "Scotsman" with decision. He had made up his mind.

Hard upon that clarion call came the awakening of ducks, of geese, of cows in the byre, and horses in the field, the clatter of milk-pails, the sound of warm milk tingling, the farmer's voice, the postman's knock, and last the slow departing thud—thud—thud of a horse setting out to market, coming louder for a moment, but gradually dying further and further away until only the movement of David's mouth let them know it was still hammering through the keen morning air.

It was a great performance and was received with a storm of applause. Mrs. Lamont so far forgot herself as to clap outright, and the children shouted for more, always more.

"I told you," cautioned David, "that was my last."

And then in the sad little silence that followed, the elderly clergyman uttered a nervous cough and remarked stiffly.

"Long ago I used to imitate the drawing of a cork—a champagne cork," he added recklessly.

"I know," cried David, "jolly difficult."

"It is," admitted the elderly clergyman, with the same solemnity. "Just a moment—please all look the other way."

He inserted a finger in his mouth, shot out one cheek, and pulled a cork, an undeniable perfect cork.

"Never heard a better," said David, "never."

The elderly clergyman smiled, and without apology, contributed a stone falling into a well, a hen leaving a nest box, and a cat upon a wall—all of which seemed

to cause him as much delight as the rest of the carriage. Warmed with such exertions and strengthened by the wisdom of being hanged for a sheep—he lifted the little boy upon one knee and blew upon the face of a large gold watch.

“You blow,” he said and looked sharply out of the window. The train was drawing up at a small country station. Without another word the little clergyman set the child back on his mother’s lap, thrust his hat on his head, and folded his paper. The worn grey look once again had fallen, as a shadow, upon his face, his eyes as he bade them good night were the eyes of a man robbed of something he would never learn to do without.

The train moved out again into the open moorland, and before the sensation created by the clergyman’s exploits had died away Mrs. Lamont, with the air of a woman pledged by some inner conscience to perform an act of heroism, untied the lid of the wicker basket on her knees, and remarked in a flutter of agitation,

“What do you think I have here?”

The children, perceiving for the first time an elderly and apparently terrified lady eyeing them so desperately, drew together and, for an instant, the future hung in the balance.

“A bear,” cried David to give a lead.

“A walrus,” shouted the eldest boy hopefully.

Mrs. Lamont, whose heart was beating wildly, shook her head.

“A cat,” she replied and suddenly revealed the ancient face of Snow.

That was a great moment, but only a moment. For already the train was slowing down, and, with the panic of a country woman, the mother was cramming on a hat here, buttoning a dress there, gathering parcels and string bags and in a great dread that they would all be carried on into the night and never get out at all.

David lifted the children out, laid the packages on

the platform, took their address, wished them all good night and waved from the open window.

"I suppose we must be near Inverclover now," he said. "It looks lonely enough for anything—I expect it's always wet and sloppy."

Mrs. Lamont nodded.

"I never cared for the country," she said.

"Gives me the blues," agreed David. Then, "I suppose you don't live here?"

"No, I'm going to keep house for my brother—he's the minister."

"That's jolly good of you."

Mrs. Lamont shrank ever so little. "My husband died recently," she went on hurriedly, "and so as I have no family——"

"Rather a break, isn't it," ventured David, always deeply intrigued by other people's affairs, "leaving your home like this."

Mrs. Lamont met his simple scrutiny and made a little jerky movement with her hands.

"I hardly like to speak of it," she said, "but since—since you mention it—it is rather a wrench. But it was thoughtful of my brother to ask me, and he lives quite alone."

David considered the point.

"I couldn't very well be selfish," pleaded Mrs. Lamont, anxious for some support, and moved to a kind of timid defence of her action.

"No," agreed David, "oh no. But duty's a rum thing, isn't it? Makes people do things they'd advise other people to avoid. It's a personal kind of job, I suppose? A man doesn't fancy being responsible for other men's lives—rather take the risk himself. After all," he broke off, "what's the use of my talking. Beastly cheek. He's your brother, not a stranger."

Mrs. Lamont was silent for a moment.

"I haven't seen him for many years," she replied. "I never knew him very well."

"Still he's asked you," encouraged David.

"Yes, he's asked me," admitted Mrs. Lamont.

IV

Mrs. Lamont was unpacking when John Parish knocked at her door and entered. Her room was large and pleasant in a bleak unfurnished fashion, and from the window could be seen the Clover river sparkling under a rising sun or ruddy with winter floods. Looking westward was a small side window, built to catch the crimson and gold of eventide and the far-off summit of Calder.

For a moment her brother halted upon the threshold vaguely disturbed. By the window his sister was sitting looking straight before her, her cheek resting on her hand, the white cat, upon a chair beside her, also staring mournfully into space. Neither had heard him enter, at least neither moved; both remained like watchers for something that both were equally confident would under no circumstances appear.

John Parish had met the Laird and Iona that afternoon. He had told them of the new improvements. He had thought Iona had coloured a little when he spoke to her of all he hoped to do. Now, as he hovered on the threshold, he felt all the glow of his labour—all the pleasant aimless vigour of his temperament ebbing away, deadened. There was no actual cause for depression. A few hours ago it had been a pleasant empty room meaning nothing but dreamless nights and swift awakenings: already it was become a room of character. Not simply because of those two silent figures silhouetted against the falling twilight—an attitude strangely familiar to him, remote though it was after all these years. He remembered of a sudden with a sinking heart his mother sitting just as forlornly in a solitary place, and with the memory looked with uneasy eyes about the room. Upon the chest of

drawers was a small black medicine cabinet; how dreary were its associations. Upon the bed was an ancient musty quilt—he knew it at a glance. In the window ledge, where the sun would no longer reach the room, stood a case containing a stuffed squirrel which he had once loved in the home he had come to believe was long since thrust forever out of his life. It was all creeping back—the close tenement house, the joyless proximity of his mother and sister against whose profound inertia his father's lively futility had been as a tragic shield. In that moment things forgotten for twenty-five years swarmed and buzzed in his brain like prisoned bees set free after many days. All the dreariness, the hopelessness, the misery of it all—the numbing, overwhelming flood that had so long carried him along like drift-wood sailing carelessly to destruction. Had he not known Annie could not change? How well he had known it in his heart.

He made a little movement as though he would speak, but it only ended in a gesture as empty as a sigh.

Upon the mantelpiece were faded photographs and a very large yellow one (a family group) that recalled to him the dining-room and his mother sitting in a kind of coma with a bundle of unmended socks sliding from her lap upon the floor.

Quite suddenly the room seemed to have grown completely dark, for he could see no more, neither the sombre curtains at the window where his sister sat nor the books and sermons upon the floor, nor, in a huge black frame, the portrait of the late Reverend Angus Lamont, from whose agitated features a photographer, practised with children, had failed to remove, even for a moment, the expression of a man hastening to remark: "Just what I was about to say, Dr. Caruthers."

"Annie."

She started, and hurriedly returned the cat to its basket.

"Come in, John," she said, rising quickly, "please come in and sit down. Shall I shut the door?"

He went over to the window and looked out. He had a confession to make.

"Annie."

"Yes, John."

"I'm sorry, but I have to go out to dinner—at Craigdune—the Ewing-Dunns wish me to meet the new people at Ardmore. Will you mind? I'll be back as soon as I can. I promised after service and forgot."

"Of course not, John. Please make no difference for me. I'll just fit in."

"I wish I could have taken you, but——"

"How could I go, John—I haven't ever met them. Besides, I can settle down, can't I? And when I have had a bite I'll just go to bed. You see I've brought my little trokes, John."

"So I see, Annie—so I see. I remember them," he added with a stealthy side-long glance at the disruption of the stuffed squirrel, at the black medicine cabinet. Already there hung about the room the sweet tainted smell that recalled as vividly as a picture his mother's bedroom. He watched Annie take a hot-water bag out of a box and hang it on the end of the bed. That, too, was familiar, and the way she rubbed her hands together at idle moments.

"Mrs. Grant," he remarked, "will look after you. She is difficult a little—needs humouring, Annie—but I hate change, you know."

His sister looked up from her unpacking.

"Never fear, John," she reassured him, and added with a shadow of a smile infinitely pathetic, "I don't think I ever cause trouble."

"No, no," he returned hastily; "it isn't that, Annie. Only Mrs. Grant is a woman with moods—you understand *moods*. And a bad manner. But all that these people require is *tact*—Annie—*tact*."

"Of course, John—of course."

He examined frowningly the tips of his blunt fingers. "Not," he added boldly, "that we are beholden to any woman, and if she thought herself indispensable—why—she would find herself in the wrong box—at *once*."

Mrs. Lamont was one of those (and they grow rare to-day) who look up to man as the untamable and superb. There were certain little laws and bye-laws that must be followed rigorously, even with such a domestic fragment as her late husband. A self-respecting woman must never argue with a man, nor worry him about little things; she must see that he is fed and, when the food is warm within him, listen to the words of authority that will simmer on his lips. She must relieve him of all trifling duties, be ever at his side to perform little errands, plan for him, pray for him. And never think of herself at all, for upon that rock is the sacrifice of the old-fashioned woman accomplished.

John Parish accepted the travail of women without question or comment. He had pondered no more upon such feverish matters than upon the political situation in Ireland, the relationship of Christianity and Commerce, the contents of the shorter catechism or any other vexing problem. He was what stupid people call a tolerant man. Like a host of others he was, in short, content to let things slide, possessing not a childlike and pathetic trust in divine intervention, but the stubborn and unruffled placidity of temper that is bred of apathy, and the vague conviction, buttressed by general acceptance, that nothing dangerous happens quickly and that, for some obscure reason, the path of the easy-going is notoriously secure.

Having achieved a demonstration as adequate as a battle cruiser pointing dummy guns at a friendly coast—John Parish prepared to depart.

"Now I must run," he said; "it's four miles, you know."

Mrs. Lamont followed him to the door.

He nodded at her, and ran downstairs, snatching up a coat in the dim hall. In the dining-room was absolute quiet, the cloth for Annie's supper not laid, no sound of activities from the kitchen.

"Mrs. Grant," he called, "Mrs. Grant."

There was no reply. All was dark and silent below.

"Queer," he said, using the Parish adjective when things went wrong. And then he remembered. It was Mrs. Grant's evening out.

Back he hurried across the hall to the stairs. Annie was coming down. She knew with the instinct of the old-fashioned woman that there was something wrong.

"Annie," he cried, "here's a business and no mistake."

"What is it, John?"

"Mrs. Grant's out—and never reminded me——"

"Never mind."

"But your supper, Annie—your supper."

Mrs. Lamont was now perfectly sure of herself. She gave a little laugh as though proud and rejoicing in her kingdom.

"Dear me," she said, "surely a woman can make herself a cup of tea. Whatever kind of helpless body do you think me."

A weight began to slip from his shoulders. But he made a feeble footling grab at it.

"It isn't that, Annie—it's the inhospitality of it. Look here, I'll not go—there's no need—I'll stay and we'll knock up some eggs. It's lonely here for you, and you don't know where things are."

"John," she said, "I won't hear of it. I shall be cross if you do anything of the kind. Indeed I would prefer to have a little quiet to settle down and I don't want to be bothered by servants."

There was some reason in that, and women were, of course, independent. There are also moments in the life of every man when tyranny of this character saps his moral courage like sparkling wine.

In the hall a clock struck seven.

"Quickly, John," said Mrs. Lamont.

With a hasty good night he left her and his hurrying footsteps grew fainter and fainter, and died away upon the road towards Upper Clover.

Mrs. Lamont closed the door and returned slowly up the stairs. In the Manse was no sound beyond the ticking of the clock in the hall, and the clear chirruping of crickets from the empty kitchen. Outside the night was creeping inwards from the open moor as the flowing tide moves with remote fore-ordination over the face of the sands. She passed into her room and sitting down near the window took Snow upon her lap, and regarded with uncomprehending gaze the shadows forming their timeless order in the Inver-clover Woods. From her mind all recollection of her brother and the weary place she had come to, was smoothed away. Once again she was in Winter Crescent before a companionable fire, and James, most feeble of creatures, reading his paper and venturing boldly his timorous opinions. One of the thousands of self-contained little worlds that had been smashed irretrievably as by an iron hand.

Long after, when darkness had blotted out the features of the landscape, and the eyes of the cat were immutable in sleep—she rose, and, faced by the grim indifference of the future, prepared, with the fortitude of women, to boil some water and make herself a cup of tea.

CHAPTER VII

FATHER AND SON

WELL, Small," said David, "still knocking about?" The butler permitted himself a wintry smile, and laid a log upon the smoking-room fire.

"I was to tell you, sir," he remarked deliberately, "I was to inform you, sir—that the Mistress is not feeling quite so strong—'eadachy, Mr. David—*unstrung*." He made a decisive click with his tongue and straightened the angle of a chair. "Without taking a liberty, sir—the Mistress pines—*pin*es."

Having repeated this word with a kind of melancholy relish, Small, who was a careful student of the St. James's Theatre, lifted a tray, shook his head and moved towards the door.

"Small," said David. The butler turned at his cue.

"Sir" (the tray was laid down).

"You said 'pin

"Did I, sir?" echoed the butler. "Did I, but she does, sir—she does."

"For what, Small?"

The butler made a little hopeless gesture, looked with a fine restrained scorn around the room, and uttered a slight apologetic cough.

"For London, Mr. David—in a nutshell, as they say, for London."

"Can't stick the Highlands?"

Again the butler surveyed the massive contents of the room, appeared to shudder and indicated that the point of view was not phenomenal.

"She depends—leans if I might say so—on little things, Mr. David—it's wonderful what even an electric kettle comes to mean to ladies."

"The house looks comfortable, Small."

"It's not the 'ouse, Mr. David—not the 'ouse."

"Then what is it?"

"It's the little poppin's-in, sir—the little talks on the telephone, the little circle of hintimate minds over a nice cup of tea. There's Doctor Bennett, thorough gentleman, and Mr. Willoughby as nice a vicar as *I've* ever met, sir—there's one and there's another always a-poppin' in. But *here*——" And in a tragic silence he gathered up the tray and prepared for his exit.

"Small," said David.

"Sir" (the tray was now laid about three feet from the door).

"It's all jolly fine—but aren't we settled here? Hasn't my father arrived for the summer?"

"Mr. Manning, sir, has arrived. He came with Sir Price Pringle, a Mr. Robert Steep, and Mr. Victor Hepburn. He arrived yesterday, since when Sir Price, sir, has departed, and the other gentlemen are leavin' in a few minutes. For town, sir."

"Is my father well? Did he enjoy the run?"

"He looks well, Mr. David, considering everything."

"Considering what?"

"The life, sir, that Mr. Manning leads. 'Ardly a moment to himself, sir—cruel, I call it—quite."

"Well," said David, "when these people have gone he'll have a breather."

"A breather, sir? Oh no—oh, far from it."

"Not?"

"No, sir. Mr. Manning," he said with the precise tone of a man unveiling an incredible thing, "leaves for the States to-morrow. America, sir. It is a pity, Mr. David—in many ways a pity."

"Is my mother going, Small, or is she remaining here?"

The butler permitted himself a dark and meaning glance.

"She is not going, sir, the Mistress is not going. Likewise she is not staying at Hardmore."

This time he took up the tray with firm and exultant hands.

"For some time, sir, speakin' in confidence, the Mistress has contemplated a rest cure, complete bodily and mental collapse. It is likely we journey south in a day or two, Mr. David. There is no question this massage treatment is well spoken of and very much in the fashion just now. Excuse me, sir, I believe the gentlemen are coming."

David heard the crisp incisive voice of his father.

"Settle it your own way, Steep, and Hepburn here will keep me in touch. Come along to the smoking-room. You've just five minutes. David—are you there?"

His father, short, alert, clean-shaven, came swiftly into the room and gripped his hand. It was months since David had looked into those extraordinary, living, restless eyes, burning their perpetual fire in the white unhealthy face crowned by a head completely bald.

Behind his father walked two men eminent (of course) in a department of life David had never connected with his father's activities.

"Let me introduce you, Steep," said his father. "This is David, my son,—Hepburn—my son David."

Robert Fenton Steep, the editor of the "Courier" (suspected by Charles Veriter of dwindling funds) was about five feet high and very protuberant in places, the kind of celebrity who moves amongst other mediocrities at literary gatherings wearing the distracted air of a person uncertain whether everybody is staring at him or not. He favoured large horn spectacles inspired by the undying hope, petulant people said, that some day one of the lesser cartoonists would pounce on him,



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together with his beard, his carefully disordered hair, his air of omniscience, and compel friends and foes alike to nudge each other and fondly murmur "How like—how wonderfully like——"

Victor Hepburn, a tall cumbersome man of forty, who wrung David's hand with the air of having every intention of knowing him (and his father) exceedingly well, was, as everyone is aware, quite in the front rank of the modern school of novelists. But so catholic is the horizon of the artist to-day that he paid a keen and disturbing attention to all matters affecting social and political prestige, conducted a publishing business, and owned a brilliant weekly. As a harmless relaxation, Victor Hepburn (whose wife wrote poems of despair so finely) delivered himself over to a profound sense of the futility of life. He was tremendously Russian. It was in that dark and sorrowful mood he wrote "The Backwash," "Catastrophe" ("A Study of Fear"), while at that very moment, even while he held the hand of David in his large confident fingers, motors were humming up to the Times Library and Mudies for the second volume of "The Iron Gate," a trilogy of remorseless force, a book that "just strode on and on," as one stricken reviewer put it, and planned within a million words to treat without flinching, but with a calm set jaw, the hopes and dreads, dogged eloquent joys and humble emotions of a charwoman about whose psychology so little is known. . . .

David listened modestly to the quiet observations of Robert Fenton Steep, who was in his turn paying a keen and critical attention to the final instructions Francis Manning was pouring into the alert ear of Victor Hepburn.

The door opened and Small stood waiting upon the threshold of the hall. "Better go now," said Francis Manning, "better go. Just sixteen minutes to catch your train. Plenty of time. Good-bye—good-bye."

For a moment it seemed as though they had forgotten

David, then talking rapidly to his father they each held his hand a moment, discarded it, turned their backs, and went out of the room, across the hall and down the steps. There was a loud bang, and the noise of a motor speeding away, changing gears, speeding further, dying swiftly away.

Through the open doorway David could see his father standing underneath the lamp. He was staring upon the floor. Already his mind was racing on. The buying of a paper was an incident soon accomplished. To him Steep and Hepburn meant nothing—nothing but skilled labour directed with ruthless skill and foresight to accomplishing a definite end, carrying a particular position. The whole matter was incidental, momentary, like a piece of ordnance moulded for the destruction of a peculiar obstacle, moulded and cast aside. They had come and they had gone. After a while when the scheme had served its purpose he would scrap it. He would require it no more. And with the machine so far as he was concerned, in that final necessary catastrophe, would pass the tools, the Steeps and the Hepburns, scrambling one upon another winning it might be to safety. . . .

Mechanically—a man ruled by time—he drew out his watch. It was just six o'clock. He was tired—lately he had grown terribly tired. He knew he was working harder, always harder, whirled ever faster in the wheel of his own making, gaining momentum, speeding wildly onward. The pace was awful, increasing inevitably. It was bound to go on increasing until the crisis was reached.

"David," he called, and then came back quickly into the room.

"David," he said again. "I promised we would dine with some people called Ewing-Dunn to-night at seven-thirty. I want to see him about something and I may not have time again. It is six now. We will start in the motor at seven. I must dictate some correspond-

ence now." He was again at the door, drumming with his fingers on the woodwork, thinking of the various letters he must write.

"Father."

He started and for a moment his face relaxed.

"Yes, David—yes."

"Did you get my wire?"

"About your exam.—yes—we'll speak of that later—in the motor. To-morrow I travel to Glasgow, catch the boat at Queenstown."

The butler was crossing the hall in answer to the bell.

"Small, call Miss Rogers—at once. The motor at seven—you understand."

Still he lingered for a moment staring at David like a man in a daze, as though he struggled to piece together some vanished memorandum, to recall something he had meant to say. Then hearing the low warning cough of Miss Rogers, his invaluable secretary, he let his hand fall from the door and went quickly past Small and into the library. At six-fifty his voice was still droning laboriously on. It was after seven when in the same wild hurrying fashion they sprang into the motor, banged the door, and set out.

II

His father had reserved this time for David. He had written down, as it were, in a mental note "7-7.30 *Business, David.*" Within the confines of thirty minutes (now reduced to twenty) he was prepared to give the matter his entire attention. Many a man would have gladly paid a hundred down for such an opportunity. But to David, sitting in the comfortable landaulette beside his father, the whole matter seemed elusive, difficult to formulate in words. And his father preserved, according to his habit, absolute silence, the kind of patient non-committal silence that turned the

scale in a critical transaction. Even with his son he clung to the convention of the money market.

They were out upon the highway towards Upper Clover when David spoke.

"I'm jolly sorry about this exam."

Francis Manning gave him a keen look but made no comment.

"Of course I can't pretend it makes much difference—one way or another—not like a good degree."

"I think it is a mistake, David—a mistake to fail. If a man fails in an easy thing, he will fail in a big one." This was going too far.

"Not necessarily, father—not if he cares about the big thing."

Again the quiet decisive voice broke in.

"Success to-day is won gradually, step by step, year by year. It is scientific. Luck is at a discount. A business rises slowly—brick by brick."

"I meant life not business," said David vaguely.

"Life is only different from commerce in one respect—it is bigger. The laws are the same."

"I don't see how you can look on everything as cut and dried."

"How else would you look on life? I have succeeded. How? Simply because I have never allowed for chance. I have tested every step of the road. Where others have plunged, or theorised, or blinded themselves by abstract principles I have concentrated upon the immediate future. I have fought every inch of the way. If there is a God He is behind the man who leaves Him out of his reckoning. What you mean is that you cling to sentimental notions of right and wrong. Inefficiency always does. Humitarianism. Isn't that it, David?"

"Perhaps. After all there are finer occupations than beating other people down."

His father was not irritated. He merely considered *the* point and found it unstable.

"Failure, then, is to be the height of success, eh? Even your Mr. Bunn would not shoulder that absurdity."

David reddened.

"It all depends what you regard as failure," he said.

"My dear David," broke in his father with the first sign of impatience, "I cannot enter into a discussion on philosophy, nor am I open to express my views on the Sermon on the Mount. All I know is that at the age of twenty-one you have no market value. That is a blunt fact. That that is a condition to be envied I will not admit. The immediate question therefore is—what are you to do? In other words, are you prepared to make a living or are you not?"

They were nearing Craigdune, and still David made no reply.

"Think it over—get at grips with all this academic trash. Drag it into the open. Your inclination is to sympathise with people who've never made good. That's the quickest, the easiest road to never making good yourself."

III

It was ten o'clock and John Parish came down the steps of Craigdune with them. He had accepted an invitation of a lift. As they would return by Inverclover he sat beside the chauffeur to direct the way.

Inside Francis Manning smoked for a while in silence.

"That man Ewing-Dunn is smart," he said, "clever chap, but like most Scotsmen made to type. Goes so far and no further. Works day and night at his whiskey and tries to forget it. Ashamed of it at heart. Overwhelmed by reactionaries. Carried backwards by his wife and daughters. Most ambitious men can get so far, and then comes the parting of the ways. Some go on. Ewing-Dunn has not only stopped—he's returning on his tracks. Wants to be a landowner. Comes

down to dinner in a kilt. His son will be as feudal as an Earl."

He drew at his cigar with fast nervous puffs of smoke.

"Funny—human nature. Always reactionary at heart—always hide-bound to something. It takes centuries to break free—to forge right ahead without barnacles on your keel. But the day's coming. There's nothing the past can give us save old tags of religion, worn out mediæval superstitions, a kind of national muzziness. Ewing-Dunn has set his heart on laying out an old fellow called Grahame. Once Grahame is gone people will accept him as their tribal chief. In a century other men will make a dead set at his grandchildren. He showed me a family tree, proving some connection with the district. Paid for it. There's a come-down, David."

He eyed the broad back of John Parish, and gave a short laugh.

"How do you like Ardmore?" he asked abruptly.

"Not much," admitted David.

"No more do I, boy; no more do I. It lies in a hollow. When I can get a day we will see, David—we will see."

"What kind of house do you want?"

His father did not reply. He was leaning towards the window looking out. They were sweeping down the Upper Clover road, and opposite them, grey under the clear moonlight with the river rushing at its foot, stood Garroch. With a single swift gesture Francis Manning rapped sharply on the glass behind the chauffeur. The car drew up, and he leapt down.

"Mr. Parish," he said, "whose place is that?"

"Mr. Grahame's—it is a very historic house."

"Then that is Garroch?"

"It is."

"And all the surrounding country belongs——"

"Most of it, Mr. Manning, though I fear, owing to adverse circumstances . . ."

"I know all that. But the loch there?"

"Oh, yes."

"It is a wonderful position. One could work wonders with such a site."

The minister laughed pleasantly.

"We are very proud of Garroch," he said.

Francis Manning glanced at him quickly and back again. Then turning he said:

"David, take Mr. Parish to his house and return. I would like to remain."

He offered no explanation, shook hands abruptly with the minister, and stood looking across the valley.

"Don't be astonished at anything the Guv'nor does," said David apologetically; "he's like that. By the way," he added, "had I the pleasure of travelling with your sister to-day?"

John Parish shook his head.

"I have hardly seen her," he replied, "but she arrived this afternoon—from Glasgow."

"Looked rather delicate," pursued David, "dressed in mourning."

"Yes," said John Parish absently, "that would be my sister." He turned the subject.

"Why not come for a day's fishing? What about to-morrow?"

"Thanks awfully—when shall I turn up?"

"Any time after breakfast."

They were at the end of the Manse avenue. With a hurried good night John Parish scrambled out and the car returned up the solitary moonlit road. Francis Manning was standing where they had left him, staring intently across the moonlit valley, in his hand a note-book upon which he had entered some hasty plans and memoranda. He shut it with a snap as the car drew up, and, getting in, relit his cigar.

"Mr. Parish asked me to fish to-morrow," said David.

He made no answer.

"He seemed rather a good sort."

The rapid puffing of smoke broke off.

"He's travelling in dead stock."

Knowing that his father was not given to cheap flippancies David took refuge in discreet silence for fear of a sharp continuance of their interrupted discussion. But the mind of Francis Manning, swinging back for an instant (as the paw of a tiger might indolently check a cub) sped on upon its smooth directed course, winging its way over the dark Atlantic across which he was so soon to follow it.

In the library Miss Rogers was sitting alert, indifferent to the tyranny of hours or sleep. His father cast him a hurried "Good night" and, entering the room, recommenced his interminable dictation.

Small loomed softly out of the shadowy hall, informing him, in a sepulchral whisper, that Mrs. Manning was asleep, and would see him in the morning.

David went carefully up the stairs, for fear of disturbing his mother, lit a candle, and entered his bedroom. It was very sparsely furnished, a gaunt melancholy place with a four-poster jutting starkly out from the stained wall. He laid the candle upon the mantelpiece and, pulling back the heavy curtains, leant out of the open window. Below, and far over the silent moor the moon was shining placidly. Over the white stretch of water a faint mist hung. In all the night was an enduring silence.

Somewhere in this old, unfriendly house his mother was lying in bed, unconscious of the immensity of life and death, wrapping her limitations more closely about her year by year, beyond the touch of poverty, or sorrow, or pain, impregnable to all the storms of human strife.

In the room at the end of the house a yellow rim of light was shining. To David the thought of his father, masterful, tireless, Napoleonic, suddenly awoke an answering emotion. Staring out upon the impotent splen-



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dour of the night he saw him driving for ever onwards, unfettered by accepted faiths, the spirit of force, striding across the world.

Turning away he let the blind fall. At the back of his mind lurked once again the deadening mystery of it all. What good would it all accomplish? To what goal was his father being carried?

1



CHAPTER VIII

THROUGH THE PASS

I

UPON the whole John Parish was satisfied that Annie would not be a nuisance. She was tiresome, of course, had irritating ways, was quiet without being reposeful, moved somewhere beyond the simple outbursts of humour he enjoyed; was on tenterhooks to do the right thing; got up elaborate little surprises, dishes he particularly disliked; planned a devastating clearance of his desk. Little things kindly meant that brought a look of genuine terror into his eyes, when, crossing the threshold he speculated, "Heavens, what is Annie doing upstairs?" He bore it patiently enough.

But Mrs. Grant was made of sterner stuff. She could not see the dust of years swept aside as though the house were a suburban villa. In her this running to and fro, this looking into things, this tendency to carry pails roused the proud spirit of independence. She had no love for Mrs. Lamont. She meditated very deeply these days. (In her mind only) she turned things over, she looked ahead.

To John Parish there was something pernicketty about Annie. She was always in the right. She was always in time for things, always had her purse, never forgot her umbrella. And with her environment of depressing perfection she carried a kind of Christian humility such as one rather liked in the early martyrs but not at all in Annie. She had married a husband only

slightly less furnished with the humbler virtues. To John Parish, robust, thoughtless, lazy—the late Reverend Angus Lamont stood out in the past and would persist in standing out in the future as a mere rabbit of a man who had passed his earthly pilgrimage in a fluttering acquiescence, and whose chant “I entirely agree with you—entirely,” had for some obscure reasons a kind of immortal resonance. This abject, hapless creature, forever attempting with mute heroism to stem a permanent cold in the head, had “contracted pneumonia while answering a call at Peebles.” To Annie and Angus the call had seemed almost a national upheaval, and Peebles like the far-off spires of the Promised Land. In the midst of their little heightenings of pride and preparation, their misgivings and their dependence upon each other, came with no blare of trumpets, but rather clumsily, the turning of the ways. Into the remote importance of Angus Lamont’s life Death entered and passed on; and of a sudden the Presbytery realised his existence and gravely confirmed its conclusion in a minute; neighbours grew pensive in the thought that never again would they see the little man with a grey comforter around his throat scurrying for a bus; a young minister preached acceptably in that place at Peebles upon the greater call that no man can deny.

Upon the whole John Parish was pleased with himself for doing the right thing. If he had not asked Annie to come he would have felt rather uneasy in conscience. It might only be for a few months—a year or so. Time worked out these things. . . .

It was a gorgeous morning and he felt particularly fit and happy. He had enjoyed the evening at Craigdune, the run back with the Mannings. He had a proper satisfaction that wealthy people were settling down in the neighbourhood. Things were looking up. With a little support one could put the church in order, institute some social gatherings, liven up the village. In the

hall the clock was striking seven. He remembered that David Manning was coming to fish, and sprang out of bed. There was a lot to be done, tackle to get ready, lunch to be packed, letters answered, the pullets to be fed. The rush of it all. There was never a man happier with trifling things to do, animals to feed, letters to be posted, roses to be pruned, incubators to be watched with the calm eye of science.

Half an hour passed and John Parish thundered downstairs. He saw Annie busied about something, an apron around her waist, but he had no time to stop. He hoped, dispassionately, that she was not overdoing things. He was quite resolved that Annie must not undertake too much.

The postman alighted from his ancient bicycle, and John Parish, intent on fishing rods, hens, lunch, must needs halt and grab the letters. There were quite half a dozen, and the "Scotsman." It was enough to overwhelm a Francis Manning.

"Annie," he cried with considerable simulation of dismay. "Annie—*look*."

Mrs. Lamont raised her eyebrows, and made a clucking with her tongue. Terrible! Surely never was man so buffeted with labours.

Stepping on to the gravel he cast the sky a shrewd scrutiny. There were light clouds over Calder, and a soft breeze running with the Clover river. The day was good. There would be a nice light on the water. Already in his mind he was tying on a dark brown sedge, or a grouse and olive. . . . Letters—letters.

A book list from Edinburgh. Someday he must buy something just to keep in touch.

An appeal for a mission hall in Albania terminating in the veiled threat that unless an immediate reply was forthcoming the Society would consider it a favourable opportunity to send the Rev. Migrovato Szerada to make a personal plea from the pulpit of Inverclover.



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"Annie," cried John Parish with genuine alarm, are the telegram forms there?"

A letter from a Glasgow lady enquiring whether a girl named (she thought) either Chrisholm or MacNab was staying with friends in the district, whether her morals were reliable and her cooking satisfactory "joints, plain puddings, daintily served—occasional savouries." In this envelope, as in the appeal for Albania, was no stamp for reply.

Next came the laborious and deeply resented estimate from Alexander Macdonald, who, in a discursive note, raised some further forebodings and amendments that had occurred to him during a sleepless night. He also remarked that his carpenter was ill with a cold and might, for all he knew, never recover since there was tuberculosis in his family, that the plumber had his likes and dislikes, and the price of timber was a national scandal.

Then came the ultimatum from Dr. Dumble, who, as everybody knows, was once Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Queen's Chaplain, author of "Morning Bells" and many other popular devotional books. No contemporary preacher could compose and deliver charming sermons more charmingly. No personality was so richly endowed with a fine presence, splendid address, and so happily situated in worldly goods. He was one of that rare company whose sermons sell in book form, and possessed in a high degree a facility for a selling title, being admirably supported by a sprightly and anecdotal mind intolerant of concentrated thought, united with a lively sense of the approval and benison of God. His volumes of collected sermons were published in a light, serviceable format, with the kind of title to haunt the after-luncheon meditations of persons, preferably elderly ladies, of sentimental inclination and a good table. Such pleasant pensive titles as "The Everlasting Hills," "Sermons in Little" (which was extraordinarily true), "Dew of Gold," and so on.

There was nothing to alarm the most timorous reader within those gilt-edged pages. There was nothing there for wholesome fear, or a grave face, or heart-searching. "You pay three and sixpence" was what the cordial presence of Dr. Dumble seemed to imply—"You pay three and sixpence and, quite apart from my photograph on the wrapper, you receive twelve, or maybe fifteen sermons, each with a beautiful if elusive text at the top, and afterwards such comfort, such language, such a picture of the world to come as never was. . . ."

John Parish opened the handsome envelope with the princely crest and deferentially read a note brimming over with a joyous recognition of his (Dr. Dumble's) simple goodness in accepting an invitation that promised nothing beyond an admirable opportunity for the right kind of biographer.

"MY DEAR MR. PARISH,

"What will you think of me? Your most kind letter followed me to London, where my goods friends the Perthshires sent it 'skeltering' after my heels to the High Table at Trinity. There it must have missed me during the salt and savour of the Dean of Wembly, a raconteur who made me positively fear to open my lips.

"And now to business, and here again I falter since my secretary is away and my handwriting has long since enraged the publishers and editors.

"You invite me to be with you upon Sunday fortnight. Would it surprise you to hear I had a very nice note from Mr. Kerr of Pittendreich saying he had noticed I was due to stay with the Dowager Lady Smirr over that week. Perhaps you hadn't, but so it is, and how could I keep silent upon the Sabbath!!!! Mr. Kerr is the son of my old friend Sir John Kerr, the Queen's physician, so I feel drawn to him for his father's sake, but your letter was opened first, my dear

Through the Pass

III

Parish, and so settle the arrangements yourself, and "advise" (that is the business phrase, is it not?) me accordingly.

"Yours ever faithfully,
"ARCHIBALD DUMBLE.

"P.S.—Should Lady Smirr motor over in the morning might she occupy a seat near the front?"

What could be jollier, more completely Dumble!

Whenever did morning open more buoyantly? The distinguished Archibald Dumble, the most popular preacher in Edinburgh actually coming to Inverclover.

"Annie," he shouted, "Annie."

Too agitated to wait her coming he sped within.

"Annie," he called up the stairs, seeing her with a duster upon the landing, "I say, Annie, who d'you think is coming to preach?"

His sister stared over the banisters, her mind suddenly swarming with ministers. She was "Free" herself.

"Mister Hector Dunters?"

"Of Tobermory? Really Annie."

"Not Doctor Pender Kirkwhimple?" she whispered with awe.

"No—no—be reasonable, Annie. These are not Established men."

"Oh?" she said, brightening, and appeared to consider the lighter denomination with tolerance.

"It's—it's Doctor Dumble—St. Christopher's, you know—Archibald Dumble. Coming to preach on Sunday week."

He paused considering the splendour of the visitation. Dr. Dumble took form in his mind. His subconscious impression of the great man, formed instinctively after many years of humble and honest admiration, found utterance.

"A very gifted man, Annie—persuasive speaker—great spiritual force. (Pause.) Better have the roast for supper. . . ."

II

John Parish was fitting up his rod when David arrived in the car and came up the avenue burdened with fishing gear.

"If I'm not here by eight, Smith," he said to the chauffeur, "come up the road by the river. And remember to give the note to Mrs. Manning. Say I couldn't wait any longer."

The chauffeur touched his cap.

"I think, sir, Mrs. Manning wanted pertickler to see you. About returnin' south. So Small says to me."

David pondered upon the words. His mother had been asleep when he had breakfasted, and he could not wait any longer. His father had left at six o'clock.

"Never mind, Smith, I'll see her to-night."

Again the man hesitated, then, touching his cap again, drove off, and David walked thoughtfully towards the Manse.

"My word," said John Parish, leaning an ancient greenheart against the wall, "you're well provided."

David laughed a trifle uneasily.

"I'm not an angler," he explained. "Never fished. So I bought everything. It gives a beginner a pull, doesn't it, to show them a selection?"

John Parish did not reply. He was examining with deepening wonder the artifices and lures David had purchased in an enterprising London shop. There were things there he had never seen, many he had never expected to see. An imitation prawn about four inches in length stirred him profoundly. He longed to let Colin have a sight of it. There was a spoon-bait that would have stunned a pound trout, coupled with a cast that only a tarpon of experience



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could have broken. In one small compact box after another lay gaily painted minnows, bristling with hooks, things like torpedoes weighing several ounces, a bunch of fraudulent writhing worms.

"Of course these," said John Parish with an effort, "are hardly——"

"Here," broke in David, unlocking a large tin box, "are some flies."

The minister recoiled like a shying horse.

"This," explained David brightly, and extracting what was apparently a humming bird mounted on a gigantic hook, "this the man said was extraordinary."

"It is," admitted John Parish honestly.

"He said that as a last resource salmon would often go quite mad about it."

He turned briskly to the lesser flies, and then unwrapping a gigantic rod, gleaming bravely with paint and golden bands, laid it on the grass.

"I bought a patent belt," he resumed, "for holding the butt while casting. Here's the reel—big, isn't it? Holds about four hundred yards, I suppose. If he gets out of hand I can always run, can't I?"

John Parish was long past arguing such a frail point of etiquette.

"And here," resumed David, "are the lighter rods—trout, I suppose. This is the patent attachable gaff, attachable net, and these waders come up to the shoulders and have straps. This cap shades the eyes and protects the ears at night. This patent knife is useful, he said, if you trip and fall over. Your legs go up then, don't they?"

"I really don't know. If they do, of course——"

"Of course," agreed David. "But to tell you the truth I don't want all these things. Only the man said you couldn't have too much, and I thought perhaps you would help me out with the flies. This fishing is rather a job, isn't it? I shall be roasted in these waders."

"Leave 'em here," said John Parish.

"No—really? And this flag staff."

"Leave it—take the nine-foot split cane."

The deepening shadow passed from David's face.

"No," he cried, "just like this." His eye fell on the box of ingenious inventions.

"I say," he said with diffidence, "as I won't catch anything anyway might I chuck one of these things about? It always bends the rod, doesn't it—makes up, you know."

Something in the whimsicality of the idea, the make-belief of it, reminded John Parish of Iona. It was just the kind of thing she might have said. He did not reply for a moment, being busied with the basket, then nodded, looking at David with quickening affection, wistful, lingering in his eyes.



CHAPTER IX

AN INTERLUDE

I

IT was at the Roman bridge that David first met Iona. He was leaning over the ancient masonry regarding the skill of the minister with honest admiration when the sound of a pony's hoofs cantering up the grassy slope made him turn his head. Below him John Parish was lost to the world, lost to fame, wealth and beauty, hypnotised by about three square feet of water where the current curled outwards from a massive circumference of rock. He had risen a fish and lost it.

And so Iona came riding up the incline on to the bridge and met the watchful eyes of David. It was a day of warm sunshine, and a gentle breeze; overhead a line of white clouds trailed like a shawl over the blue. All around was the absolute peace of a summer day, with no living thing save John Parish casting and casting again, and the drone of running water passing always beneath the Roman bridge. David looked at Iona, who, walking her pony towards him, never lowered her eyes but stared with frank curiosity at him. And so from then onwards whenever he thought of her in the night-time or in days of heavy trial, he saw her always riding a rough pony, her wondrous eyes looking out from a face faintly coloured, a blue cloak around her shoulders, and all the world asleep.

Below them the minister was poised intently, thinking neither of heaven nor earth, blind to Iona and the

ways of a man with a maid, his whole being centred round the light falling of three flies upon the amber current. Suddenly he drew carefully back to the bank: "I'll rest him a bit," he said, and glancing upwards saw David and Iona, staring like children over the edge of the bridge.

His hat had been thrown on to the bank, his face was red as fire, in his hand was the ancient greenheart.

"Gone," he said, "taken fright."

He walked slowly up the bank, mopping his brow.

"Iona," he added suddenly, "let me introduce David Manning. He has come to spend the day—Manning—Miss Iona Grahame."

"I'm so sorry you missed your fish, Mr. John," said the girl, turning to the minister.

"Yes," he replied; "but I went too hard at it. Twenty years ago he wouldn't have given me the slip."

"Twenty years" she laughed back.

Again he looked with the same reflective wistful eyes at David and then at her.

"Twenty years," he repeated solemnly and proceeded to tie another fly.

"I suppose I'd better have another shot," said David; "but don't watch, please."

John Parish nodded absently. His thoughts were again on the water, and the spot about a hundred yards further up where Colin had risen a three pounder (at least). To the true angler, birth, marriage, death, bankruptcy, or millions are as infant prattle when the water is in order. He had an idea they were both at his heels until he had thrown his first cast. From that moment he had passed into another country. It was so different with David. Before he had realised what had happened the broad back of John Parish was rapidly disappearing, and he was alone with Iona.

"I'll stand away, Mr. Manning," she said in a low voice; "the water's so clear you'll need every care."

David was quite in the dark about all this secrecy.

He hoped for one daring moment that she had gone after the minister. But no, she was watching him with expectant, deeply interested eyes, and a perfectly serious face. Angling was obviously sacred in Inver-clover.

With a trembling hand David released his flies, made a step or two forward, swung the cast smartly back, gave it a brisk crack like a circus whip, and was firmly enmeshed in the heather on the far bank.

There was a moment of awful suspense. He hoped she had not noticed, in which case he would remain perfectly motionless as he had seen elderly gentlemen with floats up the Thames. After all, there must be some *laissez faire* in fishing. . . .

But no. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the pony rounding the bridge, watched her leap off, disentangle his cast, all with extraordinary deftness.

"Thanks awfully," he said and swung it all nicely into a tree behind.

This time he could no longer stand as one who dreamed.

In the same lively fashion the pony recrossed the river and they both stared upwards.

"The fact is," exclaimed David slowly, "I've never fished before."

"Never mind," she said; "it's an awkward place for a tree, isn't it."

David thought it a ridiculous place. She met his eyes timidly just as though she would rather die than laugh, and wanted him to know it. Things were turning from tragedy to one of life's little comedies. But David was staring at the disorder of gut and flies above. Then setting hands upon a branch of the tree he pulled himself up, swung a leg over, and reached out an arm.

"It's free," he cried, and clambered down again. "You have a shot, Miss Grahame, give me a lesson."

But instantly she shook her head, and handed him the rod.

"Look," she whispered, "a rise."

Full of the impression that he must make an attack of some kind David shortened his line, set his teeth and waved the rod.

"That's no the way at all," cried a hoarse voice.

"Here's Colonel Gask," explained Iona, and added rather unnecessarily, "He's been watching you from his house."

II

It was impossible to take Colonel Gask by surprise. For one thing the white cottage in which he lived was perched upon a rock at the head of Loch Calder, for another he was (whatever he thought himself) a man of considerable indolence, and busied in viewing all aggressions by strangers or the movements of shepherds, game keepers, shooting parties and even the distant policies of Garroch through a powerful telescope mounted at the open window of his sitting-room.

Having retired from the Black Watch at a time considerably later in the nineteenth century than it pleased him to indicate to interested and ingenious strangers, particularly those "frae up aboot England," Colonel Gask established himself in Drumcairn, being greatly struck by the strength of its position from a military, and no other, point of view. As one of the fifty cottages where Rob Roy was born it retained its own little store of legend; but of such things the Colonel was openly or maliciously derisive, either shouting over his ramparts to the occasional tourist, "Rob Roy, ye say—he's shepherd to Farquharson, ower the tap o' Calder—eh—deid—nonsense, he's no that kind o' man at all," or, were he in one of his pranks, begging some hapless American lady to step in, and showing her



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with immense gravity Rob Roy's bed, carpet, modern grate, collie dog and box of cigars. Upon her grateful departure he would accept half a crown were it offered him, thus squeezing the orange nearly dry, and then escorting his guest through his heavily defended garden wall would, heedless of timid argument, point out the short cut to Clover, which, as he affirmed very truthfully, ensured a fine view of Ben Calder and the surrounding countryside. It also afforded the Colonel a pleasant hour with his telescope, from which he would from time to time lift his bloodshot eyes to heaven and utter his high nasal laughter, not unlike the neighing of a stallion.

When off duty from his telescope he was busied with the feeding and cleaning of his pets, which included dogs, cats, a parrot, a mongoose, and a tame fox, all of which lived in the room occupied by him in the day time and most of whom retired with him to his bedroom at night.

From his campaigning in foreign parts (a period of his life about which he rarely spoke except to inquisitive persons whom he silenced with exploits of the Peninsular War) the Colonel had brought to Inverclover quantities of rubbish—shells, clubs, birds, feathers, eggs, native mats, stools and much else. As no woman was allowed to pass the outer ramparts of the cottage he cooked his meals, and made some little play with washing up and turning the bed, but whatever he might have been in those far-off days when he was a subaltern in the Black Watch, he had long outlived those outward signs of a gentleman that are the pride of the public schools. By such a searching test the Colonel would have fallen very low. He seldom changed his shirt, wore a tartan waistcoat from which at least four buttons were absent, pale yellow trousers that had once, who knows, been the pride of Bond Street, and a short tweed coat built for a kilt and never quite at home with the upper part of the Colonel's

breeches. He was also addicted to snuff taking, and was not particular how he took it or where it fell upon his clothes. The vision of the Colonel shauchling down the glen (being paralysed upon his right side) an ancient tweed cap pulled over his eyes, a cheroot in the side of his mouth, leaning heavily upon a great silver-mounted walking-stick would not have satisfied a Moffat lady. There was beside all this his long cynical face, twisted by his affliction to a perpetual grin upon the left corner of his mouth, his discoloured moustaches haunted by snuff, his bloodshot eyes flickering with the joy of some private humour, and his inevitable nasal greeting to friends and foes alike, "steady on the richt there—steady." Such were the outward peculiarities of the Colonel which, in an age suspicious of character whether moth-eaten or aloof, would have been regarded with alarm or empty curiosity had he walked, let us suppose, into the intellectual austerity of a Glasgow club. . . .

"Yon's no the way at a'," cried the Colonel, and, taking the rod from David he pulled the decrepit hat over his eyes, doubled up his lean body, made a preliminary cast or two, lengthened the line, and dropped the flies just where the smooth belt of water stands outside the current.

"Man, I felt him," he growled in a hoarse aside. "Eh, man, he's a big ane an' no mistake."

After that the Colonel ceased to trouble his mind about David until a good half-hour had passed, when he came to the conclusion the fish had gone, and remarked amiably.

"It's no trouble, my boy. What's your name? Manning, eh? Well, tak' ma advice. There's folks think they can fish hereabouts, but better far learn yirsel'. Eh—the Meenister, ye say? Na, na, he's heavy, my boy—heavy in the wrist. I'll see ye again—I'm doon the glen mysel'"—and away he went, evidently overtaken by some obscure humour.

"Better try the next pool," counselled Iona.

They walked together through the trees, and came out upon an open glade of grassland where casting was likely to prove simpler. Eager to make headway David released his flies and was immensely gratified to see them fall softly upon the water.

"Easy—easy," whispered a low voice from the shadow of the trees to the left. A man with a fierce black beard came up on tiptoe.

"See," he said in a soft Highland voice, "this way."

"Colonel Gask," pleaded David, "said that——"

The man smiled knowingly and taking the rod stepped back and threw a long perfect cast.

That was the period when David and Iona lunched up the hillside.

"He's Colin," she explained, "he lives in the wood there. They say he is the best piper in Scotland."

David was content it should be so. He was perfectly at peace. Already the figure of his latest instructor had vanished after grassing a nice fish at the bend of the brae.

"Hadrn't we better find Mr. Parish?" asked Iona suddenly. "It must be two o'clock."

David had forgotten Mr. Parish.

"There's Colin beckoning."

And so they returned to the river.

"I think," remarked the tinker, "she'll do nicely the now. But it's a mere toy. Tak' advice. If ye hook a big ane dinna worry him."

"I won't," replied David.

"Hist," cautioned his companion, "see, Miss Iona, there's a bonny rise."

David passed stealthily up the moor. He cast a shade long, then over short.

"Hold up your point," counselled someone behind him.

"Here, give it me."

"Colin said," expostulated David to a very tall silver-

haired gentleman who had approached with Colonel Gask.

"Colin—the tinker body. He's a fine poacher but no manner o' use with a rod. Whisht, there, he's risen again. Keep back for any sake, don't spoil it all."

"My father," whispered Iona; "he's a great angler."

The Laird found the water in fine fettle. He fished up and then he fished down. He thought very little of the rod, and he preferred a veteran cast which he produced from a yellow envelope, but the trout were on the feed, and a man must make shift to show a beginner the likely spots.

He returned in an hour, and assured David that if he kept up the same progress they'd make an angler of him yet.

"Strength of arm is no particle of use," said he, seriously, "and the rod's a wretched modern wand. But you're coming to it—you're coming to it. Ye notice a change, Iona," he added keenly, turning on his daughter; "more assurance—more judgment. The truth o' the matter is," he said confidentially, "it's better to take everything the Colonel and Colin say with a grain o' salt—a grain o' salt. They have their own way, but they're not capable to learn a starter. And once the rod's in their hands ye might as well—as well have your tea," which was exactly the course David had taken. Wishing him good luck the Laird rejoined the Colonel, and together with Colin formed a critical group just out of earshot of the minister, at the end of whose line a pound trout had reached the concluding stages of defeat.

David and Iona still remained upon a bank of young heather near the river, saying little, the pony hitched to a rowan tree at hand. Iona puzzled David. He had never in his brief experience of casual encounters met a girl so frank, so free from shyness. He seemed to have known her for years, and yet to know her not at

all. She was like a beautiful child, trustful, friendly, fascinating. Even to him in his wonderful simplicity, Iona's guileless candour was astonishing. When she spoke it was always of Garroch and the lovely countryside. It was, as though she had never stepped into the southern world. Sometimes she would pause and fall into strange silences, looking down upon the running water, while David stole glances at her pale beautiful profile, a spray of dark hair fallen across her cheek, her long lashes drooping downwards. She was so openly, frankly friendly, innocent, alluring, and she was so infinitely remote.

He rose on his elbow.

"I say."

She started and turned her face.

"I think while they're all over there I'll just try on this big minnow thing. One never knows. The man in the shop said throw it across a rough part and let it spin itself over the current."

She laughed.

"Oh do—please. Don't let father see, though."

With the stealth of an Indian, David removed the cast of flies, attached the minnow (not a bad catch in itself) and crept down the river.

"Now," he said decisively.

The minnow flashed through the sunlight. It entered the water with a sullen splash, righted itself and whirled across the rushing current towards the shallows.

Suddenly there was a rush, a terrific tug and the reel uttered a shrill scream. David had achieved a fish.

"It's on," cried Iona; "it's making downstream."

The reel continued to scream hysterically.

"What shall I do?" he shouted, overwhelmed.

"Run," she called, "run or he'll break you."

The three critics having decided that John Parish should have grassed his trout ten minutes sooner had a sudden vision of David, and set out without delay.

"Let her oot," roared Colin, "let her oot, sir—dinna play pranks with yon puir rod."

"Haul her in, boy, haul her in or she'll leap the falls." This from the Colonel, itching to snatch the command.

The Laird was gesticulating from the hillside, hoping to cut them off. Further away the minister was running heavily waving a gaff.

"She's a whustler," screamed Colin. "Eh man, she's a whustler an' no error. Maybe if I took the rod——"

But David only gripped the butt the tighter.

"Man—she's a five pounder," gasped the Colonel. "Shall I handle her a wee?"

No, David was adamant.

There came a sudden ominous pause, a slack line.

"She's gone the now," said Colin his hat in his hand. "A' weel it's too late to say what micht hae been. But thae English rods are no for fush."

"I knew it," breathed out the Colonel hoarsely. "What was the fly, Manning boy?"

"It wasn't a fly, sir."

He was reeling in at the moment. Before he could tell of the strange phenomenon at the end of his line there was a rush, a heavy splash, a moment of indecision and they were all thundering helter skelter down stream. The real run for the falls of Calder had commenced.

Now every fish of experience and weight heads for the falls of Calder, and, unless an angler can rely on stout tackle and a serviceable rod, raising of the butt will lead to calamity. David had been told to run and he ran. Sometimes perforce he jumped, twice he crossed the river, once he took a wall in a fashion that drew an inaudible oath of admiration from the Colonel. In that momentous race the field straggled out, Iona cantering ahead of David warning him of obstacles, the minister labouring along the other bank, gaff and



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net in hand. The Colonel and the Laird finding the pace too hard hurried into Drumcairn and wrangled whose turn it was to have an eye to the telescope. Colin had disappeared.

"He's gone," groaned the Colonel. "He has it all his ain way. A fush is like a boltin' horse—it's sheer madness to give him a loose rein. If I had only taken the rod at the start."

"Nonsense, Gask—the lad's doing fine—where in the world is Colin?"

There was a check at the Roman bridge, a moment or two of hope, and then, in the same tireless, reckless fashion the run proceeded until at the bend of the road could be seen the falls of Calder. Above the falls the river widens and there is a shallow stretch across which a fish must dart before the narrows pour over the rocks. In the middle of that belt of neutral country David saw a man wave to him with a landing net and splash into the shallow running water. It was Colin. He also saw Iona galloping towards him. Nearer and nearer she came, then turning her pony cried as he passed, "When Colin waves his hand, turn him, even if it breaks the rod."

"Right'o!" said David, dimly comprehending a crisis to be at hand.

The line eased a little, and he dropped to a walk. Then suddenly there came a shrill halloo, Colin's arm stood for a moment black against the skyline, and David knew the moment had come. He raised the butt, and pointed it. The tip of the rod bent swiftly downward, the line played out foot by foot through his clasped hand, the strain intensified—there was a tug-tug-tug thrice repeated, and with a snap the split cane had broken on the top joint.

"Man," groaned the minister, "but that's a pity."

"Gone," said David; "there's Colin getting out."

John Parish started, and then raising his hand brought it crack across David's back.

"He's netted it," he cried, and set off running down the bank. . . .

"He'll be about five pound," said Colin, when calm was restored.

"A bonny fish," remarked the Colonel. "I ken him finely."

"He was at his last gasp an' when the strain came just swung aboot, shook his heid, and slippit intae the net tail-foremost."

"I would put him at nearer five and a half," said the Laird.

"If no sax," lied the Colonel, nodding his ancient head.

David looked from one to the other and then held out his hand to Colin. "Thanks awfully," he said simply.

The Colonel was holding something in his open palm. It was the artificial steel minnow.

"God," he gasped in awe, "I'm no surprised he ran."

"Iona," called the voice of Miss Christina, "Iona, it is after six."

David turned and met the eyes of the old lady fixed intently on him.

"James," she said again, "how can you allow Iona to stay out so late?"

The Laird started guiltily.

"Mr. Manning," he said, plunging at a subterfuge, "let me introduce you to Miss Macdougall."

"Look at Mr. Manning's fish," cried Iona.

Her aunt glanced at the great trout and then back again at the girl's excited face, the faint flush in her pale cheeks.

"Won't you come in, Mr. Manning," she said after a pause, and then again, "Iona, it is after six."

David hesitated, then seeing the old lady was waiting for him he thanked her, and passed into the garden of Garroch.

III

It was nine o'clock when the motor drew up at Ardmore. The house was dark under a falling night, dark and silent. In the hall a solitary light was burning faintly.

David rang the bell and waited, then uneasy at the long delay rang again. Footsteps sounded afar off coming heavily across the hall. A man whom he had noticed in the lodge opened the door and peered out.

"Hello," said David, "where's everybody?"

"Gone, sir."

"Gone? gone where?"

"To London, sir. This letter was left for you. There was some misunderstanding."

He came quickly up the steps and under the lamp tore open the envelope.

"DEAR DAVID,—

"How could you run away without even seeing me? How could I know you would be out last night and away at all times this morning? Your father is a busy man and I suppose must be excused, but it hurt me, David, never to have a word or a look after all these months away. Did your father not explain to you that I must go south *at once*. I know my poor health is tiresome, but I did look for a little sympathy, and were it not for Small to whom could I turn? I am not cross with you, David—only *hurt*, and as I do not want you to feel tied to me, and in fact I am not to be allowed to see anyone for a month at least—you must please yourself whether you remain in this terrible house or return south. I enclose a cheque for twenty pounds,

"Your loving

"MOTHER.

"P.S.—As the servants are all taking a month's holiday I am *at my wits' end* to know what to propose,

so hadn't you better stay quietly at Ardmore. The gardener's wife has promised to see to your wants."

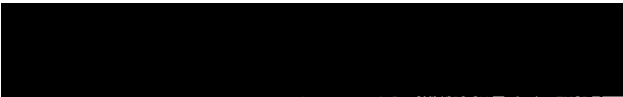
David folded up the letter and stared blankly at the uncouth figure of the gardener. The reaction after the unclouded happiness of the day was so swift, so stunning. For a few hours he had forgotten how lonely his life really was, how tedious, how bleak. And on top of it all the plaintive injured cry that rang throughout his mother's letter.

The man coughed gloomily. He wanted to return downstairs.

"Good night," said David and turned away, leaving him staring vacantly under the lamp. On the landing a solitary candle was lying. He lit it and passed slowly along the shadowy passage, past his mother's empty room, his father's empty room, until he reached his own door.

Once again he crossed to the window and flinging up the sash faced the stretch of barren moorland obscured to-night beneath a sullen heaven.

The vacant windows above him and below stared coldly outwards, tenantless, with no spire of curtained light. He thought of his father now speeding through the darkness, oblivious to every living soul, of his mother lying already within the cloistered harbourage of her London nursing home. Their coming and their going had left no deeper impression than a coil of drifting smoke. He found it difficult to convince himself his mother had ever really slept in the room along the passage, that she had been and she had gone, and that to-night he was alone. Taking up the candlestick he returned to the corridor, opened the door of his mother's room and stood looking inward. The bed was covered by a sheet, the dressing table was bare, throughout the place hung a kind of vacancy. But in the fireplace the ashes still clustered. No question of that.



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Lying in bed his mind drove wearily backwards and forwards, covering and returning upon its tracks, determined one moment to leave for London in the morning, stealing away the next up the road to Inverclover. Until suddenly he fell asleep and dreamed that Iona came riding towards him in the moonlight, riding nearer, laughing as she came.

CHAPTER X

TWO OLD MEN

IN the coming of the dawn a soft rain obscured the summit of Calder, and travelled towards the lowlands of Ardmore. It was about ten o'clock when Colonel Gask watched James Grahame turn the corner of the brae and set his face towards Drumcairn. Considerably mystified by these tokens of sociability he rose and, marching out of doors attended by a guard of retainers, the parrot on his shoulder shouting profane confidences into his ear, limped to the flag staff and ran up a banner, patched at irregular intervals and long since baffling to the intelligent on such technical matters. It signified the drawbridge was down.

Returning to the house, he lit the fire (which he was seldom without) straightened the room by taking articles of furniture from one undesirable place and putting them down in another, brought from the cupboard a bottle of whisky, glasses, biscuits and cheese, took a great quantity of snuff, and stared thoughtfully at the portrait of his grandfather, a fine old gentleman with a very inflamed nose but a shrewd and kindly eye.

About his feet standing thus in reverie, the two West Highland terriers sat on their haunches, being old dogs and wise, watching his face and saying one to the other "Callum, what's he up to the now."

"I am not knowing, Rhona, but it cannot be a game because of the silver box in his hand. When he puts

dust up his nose he remembers he is a man and must not play."

"You are right, Callum, and there is the time he sits in the evening when the fire goes out and we are cold—it is not good to move then."

"It was the rare kick I got last evening, Rhona; but I was stiff with the caller air—it was strange he was last night."

Both dogs watched their master. Then, rising, Rhona sniffed those familiar faded trousers fondly. It was enough to test the love of any dog.

"It is the wonderful man he is, Callum," she said reflectively.

"The greatest, kindest, handsomest creature as ever was," replied Callum with the blindness of loyalty.

"Where in Inverclover is his like—what ails you?"

"That god-benighted mongoose," snarled Rhona morosely, "has nippit ma tail."

The Colonel, having mused for a considerable time, shook his head, pursed his lips and rounded off his meditations by one of the fits of silent laughter that were so distressing to casual strangers. "I'm ma ain company—can a body no lauch at himsel'?" "I hed a rare crack wi' my nain last nicht—I wasna' abed afore the dawning"—such confidences were all accompanied by a shrewd squint of his eyes, by which he divided the goats from the sheep.

The Laird had reached the gate and, amidst a volley of barks, came over the lawn.

"Come away in, Garroch," cried the Colonel.

James Grahame entered the unspeakable sitting-room where Colonel Gask ate and smoked and snuffed, and, upon a raw winter's day, loaded up the fire with logs and snored in a shrill distinguished treble.

He sank into a chair, being wearied with the tramp, and stared sombrelly into the smoking fire. The Colonel, having no gift of social intercourse, shut the door,

poured out some whisky into a tumbler and laid it on the hearthrug. Then, drawing in a low chair from the outer regions of the room, he sat down, his feet resting in the grate, his shoulders half turned towards the window under which was James Grahame with a very queer look on his face.

The Colonel was more put out than he pretended. The Laird was his only friend in the district, the only man who had known him long ago. With him, as with no one else, the shield of outrageous eccentricity, the stimulation of deafness, or dumbness, or pure devilry, was laid aside. What remained? Just "Andie" Gask, a little boy who used to laugh at himself in the long ago and still laughed at himself, but with the tired grin of eighty, or as one who watches the curtain commencing to fall.

Seeing the Colonel sitting there so quiet, the company of his retainers gathered about his legs, the mon-goose, ever a forward creature, leapt lightly for his shoulder and curled itself against his neck. A kitten sat licking herself upon his forlorn waistcoat, and was presently asleep. Upon each side of his legs the white Highlanders lay curled, sleepers by stealth, while the parrot, swinging upside down from a perch in the corner, said "Rhona, ye tawpie" in imitation of the Colonel, several times, without arousing anything but an outraged growl from the hearthrug.

The longer the silence the more troubled became the Colonel. He wondered whether the Laird had fallen asleep, but a glance, magnificently casual, assured him that James Grahame was still regarding, with even greater intensity, the blue shadowy smoke.

"It's money," plunged the Colonel with some awe, having very small acquaintance with it himself.

About ten minutes later, having examined the matter from a dozen points of criticism, he took a dash of snuff and shook his head.

"It's Iona," he decided in his mind, and paused with

the silver box still open in his hand. What else could it be but Iona. . . . Had not all Garroch revolved about Iona these eighteen years?

"Gask," said the Laird suddenly.

The Colonel started and shoved the silver box into a yawning pocket.

"Gask," repeated the Laird quickly, and waiting for no response, "you must have been in most parts o' the world."

Now it had often pained the Colonel that the Laird being a totally untravelled man would exhibit an instant desire for flight should he but touch remotely on a frontier campaign.

"Och aye, Garroch," he agreed with fine indifference.

"India, China, Burma—strange places, Gask."

"Strange enough," admitted the Colonel deeply perplexed.

The Laird took a grip of each side of his chair.

"I never took much heed o' business, Gask," he said conversationally, "but there's a way of wording a letter, maybe, that keeps one's"—he hesitated—"puts it all," he added, "on a different footing, eh?"

"That's it," supported the Colonel, completely baffled.

"Last night," continued James Grahame, "I was hunting through my accounts. Now there's no manner of use pretending that I'm great at figures."

"Enough for your requirements," soothed the Colonel.

"I have a kind of dread of business, Gask, it's like the Law—better turn a blind eye to it if ye can. But there are times——"

"Of course, Garroch—of course."

"There are times when it's a duty—a sheer duty. I spent last night making a few notes," and after some research the Laird produced a crumpled piece of paper, very much smudged. "I was up till the dawning," he

added, and stared at his unformed writing with a respectful eye.

The Colonel gave the paper a quick, frightened glance, like a nervous horse, and said, "A-ha," in the neutral northern way.

"I have a notebook o' accounts mysel'," he said, "what with the dawgs' biscuits an' parrot's food. . . ."

"I've never liked to destroy papers," resumed the Laird, "though I'm no altogether sure but a better man o' affairs would be of another opinion. And yet a receipt's always a receipt."

"They say a cheque," broke in the Colonel vaguely.

"Man—surely ye've no forgotten the Glasgow Bank smash? There're occasions when cheques are no better than an embarrassment."

"I have no," remarked the Colonel with solemnity. "Ma sister Elspeth lost five pund within a week."

The Laird quite believed it.

"But figures are a terrible business, Gask. For example, can you tell me the *actual* difference between debit and asset?"

"Haud a wee now, for I never believe in rushing things like that. Debit an' asset—debit an' asset. But man, they're the direct opposites."

"I know, Gask—I'm not a child."

"Well, I'm telling ye."

"But, man, which is which?"

The Colonel wrinkled his ancient brow.

"There should be no deeficulty thereabouts," he said, "none whatever, for even if ye're wrong, ye canna be far wrong. If an asset's no a debit, then a debit's an asset."

The Laird nodded with solemn reassurance.

"You mean so long as I regard an asset as a debit, and a debit as an asset—but for a point o' curiosity, Gask, what is an asset? It sounds familiar. Bless me, surely ye've heard a man say 'Such and such a one would be an asset?'"



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"I have," admitted the Colonel darkly, "an' I always nod ma heid so, an' wink just to show I'm no a fule, an' suspected it all along."

The Laird briskened considerably.

"Thank ye, Gask," he said; "it's just one of those elementary things where a man may slip his cable. There's nothing in it, as ye say, so long as the main issues are grasped." He broke off and drew in the air between his teeth. "Tut-tut-tut," he said peevishly, "it's *credit* an' *debit*."

"Och, that's quite a different matter," said the Colonel without hesitation.

"Last night any road," he resumed with an effort, "I was thinking things over, thinking of Iona. It's not as though I were a young man, Gask, or had a son."

The Colonel busied himself suddenly with the fire.

"Must ye sell Garroch," he asked bluntly. "Has it come to that?"

"It's come to that." There was a brief silence. "Last night," continued the Laird, speaking in a pitifully off-hand manner—"Last night I went through my papers. There is a time when a man must look things in the face. I thought of Iona, and remembered I am very old. I feel stronger for it—God knows why I could never bring myself to do it before."

The Colonel stared at the fire with a face of granite.

"I know I'm old-fashioned, Gask, out-of-date, not up to things, but I can blind myself no longer. There is Iona—you understand—Iona. All my life I have withstood the flood that has swept over the north. I have been beaten. I have outlived my day. The things that I stand for are done—forgotten. I see," said he with a flash of his old fire, "little better in their place."

"It will be a blow to Inverclover, Garroch."

"A death blow, Gask—a death blow. When I sell, as sell I must, what will happen? Some stranger, ig-

norant of our race, our disposition, our pride, will turn the whole glen into a wilderness. A man like Ewing-Dunn will never pause till the last croft has gone. Do you think I come to this readily? Have I not fought against it all my life. But I have carried no weapons, Gask. I have not even the power of adding up a simple sum. They have depended on me, these folk, and on my people. We have never used them ill. When the land changes hands——” His voice failed and he made a single gesture of despair.

All this the Colonel knew so well. But in other times it had been the selling of a single farm, or range of moorland. Now it was all—all.

“Garroch House,” he said quickly, “not Garroch House.”

The Laird’s head jerked up.

“No,” he replied passionately, “there are things a man must cling to or perish.”

The tense look left the Colonel’s wrinkled face. Out of the ruins the citadel still stood four-square to the winds of disaster.

“The sooner done—the sooner ended,” said the Laird. “Men will call me a fool for my pains. Stupid I am, Gask, but it makes a man stupider when ignorant folk are clinging to his tail.”

“What is it, Garroch? I’ve been about ye, mind. I’m no altogether without gumpation.”

“I know, Gask, but it’s something more than gumpation—it’s business ways I need. The power to darken the real object. That’s business.”

“I know,” assented the Colonel impatiently. “Many’s the letter I’ve written that I’ll bargain no man could mak’ head nor tail of, least of all myself.”

“I think, Gask, a note to an estate agent—MacMurrens, for example—would prove efficacious.”

The Colonel nodded and, rising, ferreted out a dirty piece of paper and a small blunt pencil. Then putting on his spectacles and setting a table between them,

he gave the Laird a look of extraordinary solemnity.

"The whisky's at yir elbow, Garroch," he said to open proceedings decently and in order. "And now I take it ye want to dispose of the property, farms, streams, lochs and shooting rights of Garroch with disposition to retain the hoose an' adjoining policies."

"That's it, Gask. Man, I've read that kind of language in the papers."

"It's the customary form," remarked the Colonel modestly, and wrote busily for some time, while the Laird pursued his own painful reflections.

"How's this?" he said at last and raised a triumphant and heated face.

"Read it through."

"Dear Sirs,

"It has occurred to me——"

"Is that not kind of *casual*?"

"Whist—they'll ken naething aboot ye. It puts them off their guard. It's a piece of strategy. Business is all in the handbook on 'Tactics.'"

"It has occurred to me, owing to the present attitude of the Government, that I might be disposed to consider the sale of the property of Garroch, comprising some thousands of acreage of shooting, a loch, the Clover river, and a number of valuable farms, together with various small holdings, were a suitable offer forthcoming. The house itself, together with its immediate policies, and gardens, I will retain. Further particulars will be forwarded in due course."

He took off his spectacles with an air.

"How's that?" he remarked with a kindling eye.

The Laird's face was working painfully. Suddenly a passion of words broke from him.

"No—no, Gask—ye cannot fling responsibilities upon the world like that. Thank ye—take no offence, but the land's a trust—am I not right—a *trust*. It should not lie in any man's power to sell over helpless people

like that. How do I know a man like Ewing-Dunn won't snap it up? It's likely he will. And then what kind of bitter words would I hear when the leases ran out? I have lived on the land, Gask, for over seventy years and I'll do my part by the land if I bide in a croft upon the side o' Calder."

The Colonel nodded gloomily.

"I'm not arguin' with ye," he said. "I'm no sayin' ye're no right. A' weel," and he sighed, looking thoughtfully out of the window. After a moment he shifted his eyes and, avoiding the presence of the Laird, added in an undertone. "It's Iona was in my mind."

James Grahame struggled to his feet, and went pacing impotently about the window space, a man driven two different ways searching for the clear light of duty.

"Iona," he said at last, "is a Grahame. She will understand."

The Colonel made no comment. He took up the pencil, sucked it for a space, and wrote tediously upon the other side of his sheet of paper. The Laird watched him for a few moments, then recommenced his walking up and down the room, his thin hands clasped behind his back.

Several times the Colonel cocked his astute head, reading with evident complacency the words he had scribbled down, then, with a flourish, read out:

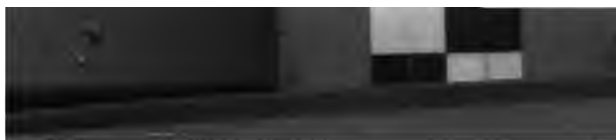
"Sirs—it's snappier than popping in "dear"—Sirs, I have been recommended——"

"Recommended?"

"It has a smack, Garroch—as though when ye were hobnobbing wi' Montrose"—"I have been recommended to approach you, in strict confidence, upon a matter of business."—"How's that for a start?"

"That's more the note."

"In connection with the disposal of my property of Garroch, Perthshire, subject to my approval in every



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respect of the intending purchaser. Particulars of the estate will reach you upon receipt of reply"—"That'll mak' 'em sit up."

The Laird read it over carefully word by word.

"But there's no mention of the house, Gask."

The Colonel winked, and looked exceedingly shrewd.

"The great secret in preliminary negotiations," he said impressively, "is to tell nothing. Just copy this, Garroch, and send it away, and later we'll forward particulars."

"It doesn't pledge me?" asked the Laird uneasily.

"It's a *feeler*," soothed the Colonel—"naethin' more or less than a feeler. Are ye away? I'll just step doon the water with ye. There's a look o' rain about the tap o' Calder."

With this casual speculation the Colonel caught up his heavy stick, whistled piercingly for the dogs, and followed the Laird's tall figure into the blinding drizzle.

CHAPTER XI

THE CALDER ARMS

I

THE two most prominent persons setting out to bring about a junction in Inverclover upon that day of weary rain were David and Joseph, the Garroch pony.

It was about ten in the morning when the innkeeper of the "Calder Arms" was handed a telegram engaging a bedroom in the name of Manning, and ordering a conveyance to meet the train from Ardmore at four o'clock in the afternoon. It asked for these things quite simply. On a telegram. Such a thing had never happened before—it was unlikely it would ever be repeated. The landlord, Robert Grahame, one of the old stock, considered the message for an hour and saw no light. He handed it to his wife. She persisted in reading it aloud word by word until he went out and sat upon the dyke. He had no conveyance except the open cart, which was only suited for luggage. He was quite unused to visitors wiring for rooms. He was not at all sure whether he shouldn't just take no heed, and run no risks. In this spirit of opposition he sought out Miss Christina, and was received in the sma' room. He explained in a tone of simmering indignation and genuine alarm that a wire had been handed in by the son of Archie Saunders ("the red-haired ane"), handed in at his front door, 'as cool as ye please,' and the boy had the final impudence to ask him was there an answer—'any reply,' as though he could afford flinging the



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money about. That he had boxed the boy's ears to learn him manners, and that neither he nor his wife had ever been spoken about in Inverclover before, and he had not dared show his face out of doors ever since. That the village would ken his auntie in Stirling had died, and be as keen as badgers to see him away in the train.

"Let me see," said Miss Christina, who was herself not unmoved at the idea of telegrams jockeying about Inverclover like halfpenny postcards. She read it with a grim face.

"Mr. Manning," she explained, "was fishing here yesterday."

"The young gentleman, Mem, who caught the trout——?"

"Yes," she said dryly.

"Och, that puts a different face on it."

"Oh——"

"But even then I hev'na a trap—only Georgie with the cart."

Miss Christina began to understand. There were wheels (in the crudest sense) within wheels. But still she maintained her strange remote silence, and Robert Grahame closed his mouth and bided patiently thinking of nothing at all. After a while Miss Christina rose from the table, passed to the window and looked out. She was acting against all her deeper impulses. She was smashing down every natural barrier of precaution and custom. They did not break easily, they had not been erected by feeble hands, nor reared for sudden destruction. Against every instinct, every belief, every argument, she raised the calm, indomitable spirit of her own keen judgment. Her mind reached from the past to the present and, facing the unknown country of the future, made its choice.

"Duncan Haggis will meet the train, Robert," she said.

"Thank ye, Mem."

"And, Robert."

"Yes, Mem."

"Make Mr. Manning comfortable."

Without another word she passed him up the stairs and out of sight.

Whatever Iona might think of her particular animal—the Miss Macdougalls considered a pony a very useful and rather picturesque item. There was, of course, nothing for it to do—Joseph frequently heard that comment with bared, caustic teeth—there was only the lawn to keep trimmed, the parcels to be conveyed from the station, shopping at Inverclover daily, calling at inaccessible Highland houses with either or both of the old ladies, while on odd days he was lent to the Doctor's family, returning home in such a highly strung condition that one lovely summer evening he turned suddenly on Jorum, the hen turkey, and landed her in the midden. Upon that dreary day when David came to Inverclover, Joseph, after an expedition to Craigduchart station for a York ham that had been dropped at Dunmore, had shuffled into the paddock and was, when the future suddenly became ominous, pulling grass with the quiet discretion of a pony who is faced by a pleasant sinking to sleep in a dry corner under the hedge. He was in this expectation altogether wrong. There is never a coming without a going, and for Joseph as for David, there was the trek across the weeping face of Inverclover, such a plunge into the mysteries of moorland as should have intrigued any pony of imagination. But Joseph was old and a mongrel. He had no sense of history. He was a hedonist, a free thinker, a keelie, and a mistake.

The feelings of Duncan Haggis, gardener-groom of Garroch, were deeper than those of Joseph. He concentrated a trained and penetrative mind upon the whole matter. But first of all he raised the usual objections. He said Joseph was lame, that the train would be late,



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that the road was up "about the Brig o' Weems"—but all the time he was thinking, he was using that great gift of God by which His creatures may follow the gleam. There were so many good reasons for fighting such a deplorable expedition tooth and nail. In the first place what kind of business was it of the Garroch machine to meet an English body who was not even the Laird's guest but staying at the "Calder Arms"? He was greatly averse to acting as understudy to Robert Grahame. He realised if the "Calder Arms" had been owned by a Campbell there wouldn't have been a whisper of all this. Then the train was not due till four o'clock, and the engine driver a man of leisurely and companionable temperament who had been known to wait twenty minutes at Dochnawhup, just because he saw the Auld Kirk minister daundering down the brae and with no intention, honest man, of travelling further than his own fireside. But the main point was this—if the train was late he, Duncan Haggis, would not be in time to play the bagpipes with Malcolm MacGregor in preparation for the gathering in the autumn. Which was enough to set anybody thinking before he went hirpling in a governess cart to meet an Englisher "frae up about Lunnon." It was not as though Duncan lived near Garroch, "him be within call o' the auld leddies—na—na." He kept six miles of impregnable moorland between his manhood and Garroch. He was not one to be told his steps were like a midden, his hens in moult, and his wife "owre hodden doon wi' bairns." He believed in the right to think, and stayed in bed on the Sabbath for fear a Macdougall should forget the sacred cause for which William Wallace bled.

On the other hand, a visitor was a business asset. It was likely enough this Mr. Manning would require a hand with the rod or gun, or other little services that are almost inseparable from the circulation of metal.

He was also not averse to a crack in the "Twa Baubees" en route.

"I'd maybe better be gettin' oot the traap," he said without excitement.

Accordingly Joseph, scandalised into a belief that he must have been sold for ten shillings and would probably make his last public appearance at the Glasgow Zoo, was backed and hustled into the governess cart. Duncan, disdaining a coat, but allowing to Hamish that it "lookit saft roond aboot Calder," crawled into the back, jerked the reins and staring steadily and without apparent recognition at Miss Christina's countenance at the drawing-room window, clattered slowly out of sight.

Joseph, having cleared the environs of Garroch walked tediously up an incline that might have evaded the notice of a casual observer, and, facing the worst, trotted in a deepening resentment against all creatures great and small along the moorland road. After a while Duncan Haggis let the reins drop upon the pony's shaggy back, and, turning, gazed for some perverse reason along the way they had come. More than once the Simpsons' motor (English tenants at Tullumhard) had lodged securely in the dyke rather than take its chances with the approaching gyrations of the Garroch pony cart.

Not that Joseph was reckless. After a long and sycophantic study of well-bred horseflesh he could shy, jib, and make foam with the best of them. But he never bolted or passed anything, even the minister's carriage (Heaven preserve it), on the road. He never refused nourishment of any description. Joseph was, in a word, exceedingly careful of himself, and though he resented the manner in which some persons handled the whip, he never allowed such procedure to cause him fatigue or lung trouble. So he plodded onwards, brooding upon such matters, cursing the day when he was sold to two old ladies and not to Iona who fed



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Donald upon sugar, carrots and cake. That a visitor was expected meant nothing to Donald. It meant everything to him. It was certain that several picnics would be planned in order that the guest might view the surrounding country from half a dozen inaccessible heights. And so upon a scorching day the party would set out—not walking, mind you, as healthy young persons should—but sitting in a crowd behind him, with a basket full of food, ginger-beer and anything else that might by some remote chance be missed and must therefore be stuffed in somewhere just in case. After an enormous journey they would pull up, scramble out and tie him to a tree to rest. Rest? For a couple of hours while they splashed about, gorged, and slept; he, Joseph, aged God knew what after twenty, would be the health resort of flies, fleas, bugs, wasps, bees, mosquitoes, ants, and insects. There he would kick, shake his harness, chew his bit, scratch his off fore with his near hind, and probably get hung up in a gorse bush. Once he had slipped the halter, and been the talk of Inverclover. His fame had even reached the pony of the Reverend Mister Havers, Free Church Minister of Drearie, and inspired him to knock over the Rev. Doctor Snell of Edinburgh, injuring his back, and laying him up at Drearie Manse for a month, a thing Dr. Snell never forgave and Mr. Havers, poor fellow, never forgot.

So, in this mood of bitterness, Joseph, most un-Christian of ponies, shuffled disconsolately onwards, being beautiful neither inside nor out, but whereas in actual texture he was thin, worn and abject, in character he was strong in evil and with a bitter and irreconcilable hatred and scorn for everything that was of good report.

Duncan Haggis, meanwhile, continued to stare fiercely in the wrong direction, and to drone in a nasal undertone common to all gentlemen handling pibroch music, “ha drum, hey drum, ho drum,” which, as at

least fifteen persons know perfectly well, is the ground work of "The Bells of Perth."

There was half an hour to wait when "The Twa Bawbees," a small white hostelry, was visible from the bend of the brae. Another fifteen minutes and Joseph came to a halt before the door, watched Duncan alight, clinked his rusty bit, and permitted himself to be fastened to the white station paling. But no sooner had Duncan stamped out of sight than Joseph by dint of backing, manœuvring, and enormous personal inconvenience attained the summit of a pony's ambition—he had contrived to back the trap so as to endanger the passage of any other vehicle on the road. Only on one memorable occasion had he achieved an accident—a real accident—but it was a very encouraging one, contributing it was freely believed towards the decease of old Mr. Hooch in the autumn, and breaking there and then young Mr. Maclauchlain's left leg.

II

David, having alighted at the wind-haunted station of Inverclover, persuaded a very juvenile but willing porter to convey his luggage to the highway. Upon the bleak roadside stood a small trap and an open cart. In the trap a large melancholy-faced man was staring with fierce intensity at Ben Calder.

"There's nothing here," said David.

An ancient man with a goatee beard and a tall hat was leaning against the open cart smoking arduously a very foul tobacco.

"I tell ye," cried the man in the trap with resentment, "I tell ye, John, that Andrew Mackay died o' diphthery contrackit at Jock Jamieson's burial."

The ancient man removed his pipe, jerked his chin up as though he had every reason to lose his temper at such crass imbecility but had no intention of being anything but patient, and screamed back: "An' I'm tellin' ye



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that he died frae naethin' o' the kind but just frae sheer devilment to bring the meenister frae Campeltown and him on holiday."

"Can you inform me, please," asked David with his unquenchable good humour still undimmed, "is it far to the 'Calder Arms'?"

The ancient man ruminated.

"No," he said deliberately, "it'll no be actually far." Then turning again to his companion, "Jimmie, hoo far wull it be to Upper Clover?"

"Aboot sax mile," responded the large figure hardly discernible in mist and apathy.

"Aboot sax mile," repeated the ancient man, and sucked his pipe to new life while the rain dropping from his hairy nose glistened upon his goatee beard.

Far off the barren flanks of Calder loomed up through drifting sheets of mist and driving rain. The summit of the mountain was lost in clouds, or soaring above them looked down, perchance, with the eagle, upon a new earth and an open heaven.

Beneath that pall of motionless cloud the glen of Clover was a country of desolation such as must have haunted the dreams of southern soldiers centuries ago. Out of the weary dripping rain came no voice; upon the other side of the road was a broken cottage in whose ruined chimney-stack some sheep were huddled together; over the marshland towards Garroch a white vapour hung suspended.

"Maybe," said the ancient man slowly "ye're the gentleman frae Ardmore?"

"I am," admitted David.

The ancient man withdrew his pipe, nodded and walked across to his friend.

"It canna be," snapped the man in the trap. "Miss Christina said, I canna mind just what she said but it's no that kind o' veesitor at a'."

"I want to go to the 'Calder Arms,'" put in David.

With reluctance the face of Duncan Haggis, as forlorn as a coronach, turned and regarded him.

"Name of Manning?" he asked.

"Yes."

With a heavy sigh he alighted.

"Step in, sir," he said, "step in and contrive yir legs as ye may, for there's a weary puddle on the floor."

The luggage was placed upon the open cart, and the ancient man, rekindling his pipe, discharged a cloud of pale blue smoke and scrambled on to the front, where his feet rested comfortably against the horse's tail, while from the direction in which he proceeded nothing could be seen but the extreme summit of his hat.

Joseph, boiling with indignation at nothing in particular, had planned a competent collision with the large kidney stone that, for some unfathomable reason, lay at the corner of the station entrance. Breaking into a canter he missed it by an inch.

"Ah, the tawpie," cried Duncan Haggis delightedly, and standing up in the cart begged David to sit well forward while he elevated the thick of the whip. In this spirited fashion they passed on to the open moor, and at the sight of the desolate waste without a house, or a hedge, or a sign of man or beast, many of the weaker sort might have fussed because their feet were splashing in two inches of water that was not likely to stop at three. It was also at that testing moment that Duncan Haggis suddenly turning his back and dangling his legs over the end of the cart continued his interrupted refrain, chanting with great relish and finesse, "Ha drum, hey drum, ho drum," in anticipation of that great piping affair in the autumn.

And so under a grey heaven, but with a light heart, David came through the pass of Gartleg.



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III

The Colonel possessed an insatiable curiosity in other persons' affairs. In the case of the Laird he was a valued (possibly over-valued) confidant, as regards Miss Christina—in whose presence he was a mere pretence of himself—his relations were nearer the secret service of the Elizabethan Court. But towards Inverclover at large he saw himself as a kind of omniscient and unsuspected observer, Jesuistical, one to whom nothing was altogether unforeseen, and most things extremely, even painfully, familiar. There were times, of course, when the Colonel was as innocent of the facts as one of Saunders' children, but he was the more daring and exasperating on such occasions, twisting his mouth, cocking his wicked head, laughing so knowingly, that simple people were glad to change the subject in dread of some shameless exposure.

The Colonel had an aching curiosity to see Mrs. Lamont. Miss Christina, also, had expressed a casual surprise that he was so late in the field, a taunt that stung in a tender place. Not that Miss Christina was in better plight herself: she merely indicated in her aloof way the path of discretion. And so the Colonel, pondering upon many things and looking unusually disreputable and abandoned, sauntered up the avenue of the Manse, and was greatly surprised to find it was a quarter to one and the table was laid for lunch.

"Come in, Colonel," cried John Parish heartily. "Here's my sister. Annie, let me introduce Colonel Gask."

"Glad, Madam, very," said the Colonel, bowing over the diminutive figure of Mrs. Lamont, and rolling an eye in his most ingratiating manner.

"The Colonel is one of our local celebrities," went on the minister, who felt the expression covered a certain personal misgiving towards the old gentleman.

"Any service I have seen, Madam," rasped the Colonel with a jerk of his ancient head, "was before you were born, Madam, born or er—thought of."

It was at that fortuitous moment Mrs. Grant looked mournfully into the room and disappeared. Lunch was served. Seated at the table the Colonel made great play with the invasion of John Parish's bachelor establishment, even at one supreme moment giving Mrs. Lamont a little naughty pat on the arm; to which she paid no attention whatever, neither smiling nor raising her eyes, recalling that sunstroke plays awful havoc with His Majesty's forces. The Colonel, making certain of her suspicions, rose to greater heights. He was the soul of daring reminiscence and anecdote. And all the time he watched Mrs. Lamont with his cunning blood-shot eyes, drank a great deal of whiskey, and finally took snuff, a habit the poor woman had only read about in books.

When she had gone he lit a pungent black cigar and played another card.

"That Manning, Parish—he's a lad o' spirit—eh?"

"A nice boy," said the minister, more at ease now Annie was removed beyond the Colonel's spontaneities.

"He's a friend o' yours, maybe?"

"No—not exactly. His father is a very wealthy man who's looking out for a place, at least I gathered so. Strange man—very modern, Colonel. Ewing-Dunn told me he's a millionaire. The boy's his only son. Mother an invalid, I believe." . . .

It was about half an hour later the Colonel set out for Garroch, and was received by Miss Christina before she retired for her afternoon nap. She had waited for him twenty minutes and was exceedingly distant and apathetic.

"I've seen the minister's sister," he said.

"Oh!"

"Aye—she's no a woman at a'—just a wee dreich

body all mourning, and Glasgae. But I felt kind o' sorry for the creature."

Miss Christina was prepared to hear why.

"Because the minister fair detests her. She keeps him on the rack."

"Is she foolish? Does she say silly things?"

"No—God save us—she never opens her mouth."

"Then how can you be sure?"

"It's plain," he said finally, "as the tap o' Calder," and rose to leave.

Miss Christina accompanied him to the garden gate.

"I hear that Mr. Manning is coming to the 'Calder Arms,'" she said, "for fishing, I suppose."

The Colonel was taken aback. He went up the glen overwhelmed by the rush of events, and the knowledge that for him the arduous labours of the day were still unconcluded.

IV

David was seated before the fire in the "Calder Arms," a clean and comfortable inn, changed and drinking tea, when a faint creak sounded at the door. It was followed by a distinct draught. Rising he crossed the floor and closed the door. He had barely regained his seat when the creak was repeated. But this time he turned quickly enough to catch a glimpse of some person's head disappearing hurriedly. As there happened to be a large mirror above the fireplace, a relic of Victorian Britain, David contented himself with remaining where he was, and was interested to see first the nose, then the yellow moustache, and finally the entire profile of Colonel Gask appear round the corner of the door and remain there regarding him with a keen and profound scrutiny. Being finally overtaken by a paroxysm of noiseless laughter he withdrew his head, closed the door silently, knocked several times, and opened it with a flourish.

"Preserve us," he cried greatly taken aback, "if it's no Manning."

"Good evening, Colonel. You did not expect me back so soon. Won't you sit down?"

"Thank ye—thank ye. But only for a moment, my boy. I just ran in for a match. Well—well—think of that now."

"Perhaps you'll take a drink, Colonel?"

"No—no—no—no," repeated the old gentleman a great many times, "at least only speerits. I never touch onything but speerits," he added with the firm note of a temperance advocate.

There was nothing the Colonel deplored more than the question direct. He prided himself upon a contempt for idle curiosity. At the same time he had not come to discuss the prospects of fishing.

"To tell you the truth," said David suddenly, "I'm here because Ardmore is empty."

The Colonel raised a solitary eyebrow, and made a peculiar shrill noise in his nostrils without further comment.

"You see, my father's gone to America, and my mother is ill in London."

The Colonel shook his head with the air of a man dubious about such a state of affairs.

"It all happened rather suddenly. My father thinks nothing of spending his nights in the train, and his days in business. He likes it. I'm sorry he's gone—I rather wanted to see something of him." His voice trailed off and he scratched a match quickly and pulled at his pipe.

"It's fine," remarked the Colonel musingly, "for brothers and sisters to spend their young days with their parents—it's only natural, and they're the best days. Mark me there, for it's true."

David jerked himself forward in his chair.

"There's only me, you see," he said as though in explanation.



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No man in Inverclover possessed a tenderer heart than the Colonel. Likewise no man was prouder of his awful cynicism.

"I was the youngest of twelve," he said, and added dispassionately, "They're all deid and buried this many years."

"It must make a tremendous difference."

"Eh?"

"I mean whatever happens afterwards there're always such jolly memories behind."

"There was my brother John," pursued the Colonel without affirmation. "I blacked his eye finely one night. He died in Afghanistan, poor felly. He wore dundrearys, maybe ye've heard tell o' them. Then there was sister Margaret—I never cared a chuckie stane for her: I canna mind what overtook that woman. There was my twin-brother Malcolm—he was the clever one. They used to say he had stolen my brains." The Colonel laughed shrilly, blew his nose, was suddenly silent, and added, "All deid, Manning—all deid and gone, me boy, and I haven't a blood relative in the world—not one. It makes you kind o' lonely when ye're gettin' on. There's something to be said for an early death—it's like having first start an' knowing how ye stand—Hoots," he snapped abruptly, "I'm hawering," and drank off the remainder of his tumbler. "I've a picture of Malcolm," he remarked in an off-hand way, "it's at Drum-cairn. Maybe if ye're passing some day—but, hets, what interest is it? Why, the lad's been deid these fifty years—half a century, me boy. It's a bonny likeness though, and the frame's black oak no seen aboot nowadays."

"Thank you," returned David. "Might I come tomorrow?"

"Leave it a day, boy—it's not often I'm prepared for veesiters. And there're other things might interest ye; but there, how could they?" he added with a twitch of his disfigured lip.

Again David assured him, and again a look of pleasure brightened the Colonel's lined and twisted face.

"No—no," he said eagerly, "nonsense. I was daffin' ye."

"It is awfully good of you, sir. You see I'm rather stranded here—don't really know what I shall do. I'd go south, but when my father returns he wants to find a property—near here. He's very keen to get a place higher up than Ardmore. Bigger."

The Colonel gave him a curious earnest look.

"I can't make out what he wants it for. He's far too busy to ever stay in the country."

"He'll not have been in Inverclover," remarked the Colonel, staring intently at the ceiling.

"The other night he drove Mr. Parish home from Craigdune. My father stopped the car. I must say the Grahames' house looked wonderful."

"He liked the Glen—eh?"

"Apparently."

The Colonel thought deeply. Twice he seemed on the point of speech and each time stared hard at David instead.

Then gripping his arm with his thin hairy fingers he leaned nearer and said:

"Manning, me boy, can you be trusted to hold yir tongue?"

"I think I can," replied David rather taken aback.

"Then hark here. Supposing Garroch were for sale would yir father be open for an offer?"

"Garroch? You mean Mr. Grahame's place?"

"The same."

"Really?"

"Sure as death," said the Colonel, falling back on a sacred oath of boyhood.

David turned the matter over in his mind.

"Colonel Gask," he said at last, "I'll be frank with you. I've told you my father is rushed off his legs.

Will you think me rather a beast if I tell you something more." He paused a second. "You see, my father and I aren't in one another's confidence. We don't seem to quite hit it off. It's only because we never see each other, you know, but there it is. He's a frightfully brilliant man and I'm a disappointment—rotten at everything. I—perhaps you understand? He looked at the house but he never spoke a word to me. He's like that."

For a moment the Colonel made no reply. Himself an infinitely lonely man, something in the words of David touched him more than he cared to admit.

"Never mind," he replied abruptly, "but keep yir eyes open. Have a look at the house, and when yir father returns maybe he will ask ye. But one thing. On no account speak a word of this to any in Garroch. Promise that, for if I ken onything about a face ye're not one to go back on his word."

"Certainly," agreed David, "of course I'll promise."

The Colonel's face relaxed.

"Then I'll away," he said, "and if ye really mean it—Wednesday's no a busy day wi' me—no," he added with the air of a man greatly in demand, "Wednesday's often comparatively slack."

When he reached Drumcairn the fire had sunk into smouldering ashes, white-edged, speckled with crimson. Outside the twilight had come long since, and passed into the encompassing arms of night. From the surface of Loch Calder, staring eternally upwards, arose the shrill noise of wild fowl, haunting the reeds. An owl called repeatedly from the belt of trees behind Drumcairn. Hardly had it ceased when there sounded the vague melancholy note of thunder amongst the hills.

He stood for a moment at the open door, his head bent, his hands thrust into the pockets of his ragged trousers. Then walking thoughtfully within he turned

the lock, hung up his hat, and felt his way to the chair by the fireplace. The room was still warm. Sitting down, his thoughts, as always, turned to Garroch, his last and dearest interest in life. At the back of his mind was lurking a scheme, in which David played a leading part. Already it was forming, taking definite shape, pointing the way. There would be obstacles. The Laird was difficult—very obstinate. But he held the cards—he was sure he held the winning cards. . . .

The night crept on, and with the dying of the fire, the figure of the Colonel was blotted out, sitting open-eyed, thinking no longer of ways and means, but of the first time Iona had come to see him, which she did alone (being six and over) carrying a bag of short-bread for his tea.

For long he remained perfectly motionless, falling at last asleep. But on each side of his chair patient eyes were raised in the darkness, and once in the chill before the dawn the soft caress of a dog's tongue brushed his cold hand.



CHAPTER XII

"THE AULD HOOSE"

I

JOHN PARISH hovered a moment on the doorway of his sister's room. She was sitting by the window mending a heap of neglected socks, the cat was stretched in the last rays of the evening sun—all over Inverclover lay the peace of summertime.

"I think you'd better come, Annie," he said, fidgeting with one hand on the door. "Miss Macdougall told me to bring you. It is quite informal—only the Garroch people and old Gask."

His sister held up a black sock with her thumb pressed into the toe. She regarded it critically then folded it up. She had no intention whatever of being a burden to John. He had his friends, and she could not believe for a moment (being a very modest creature) that they wanted her too. It seemed to her most improbable. There were other reasons as well.

"It's Mrs. Grant's night out," she explained.

John Parish was determined to do his duty.

"She only goes to bed, Annie—you know she never really goes out."

"But some one might call. It would relieve your mind to know if anyone were ill."

"Nonsense, Annie—what difference can an hour or two matter. Besides——"

She waited for him to finish.

"Besides, if a man is always at the beck and call of every old wife in the parish he'll be run off his legs."

"Of course, John—of course—and people never seem to realise how much a minister has to do."

That was sensible of Annie.

"You see," she added with a little shake of her head, "there's the laundry to attend to, these socks to darn."

"Surely to-morrow will do just as well."

His sister did not argue. But she remembered that it was a mile to Garroch, and her brother never cared about ordering out the carriage at night.

"If I get to bed early," she said, "I will be all right in the morning."

"Aren't you well, Annie? Of course, if you don't feel up to it——"

"It's nothing, John. Now don't think any more of me. Snow and I will keep each other company. There's the clock striking and you remember Miss Grahame asked you to be early."

John Parish remembered very well. But still he lingered.

"Did you like her?" he asked, swinging the door and catching it with his open hand.

"I thought her a sweet girl. How fond she is of you, John."

"Is she, Annie, did you think so?"

"She spoke so much of you. We were alone in the garden, you see."

"What did she say?"

Mrs. Lamont smiled demurely over the socks.

"Better go now, John. I'll tell you when you come home. I'll have your hot milk ready in here."

"I may be late."

"Stay as long as you like. You know I'm a poor sleeper. I like an excuse for waiting up," said Mrs. Lamont eagerly, for fear he should think of her and spoil his evening.



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II

John Parish followed Hamish across the dark hall of Garroch up the stairs and along the corridor. At the extreme end, where winding stairs went quirkily up to the library, the butler halted, and with such an air of conspiracy as might have graced the doom that shadowed Rizzio, remarked in a shrill and confidential whisper:

"Gang your ways up, Maister Parish, the Laird's hardly back from Drumcairn, but eh, sir, there's something queer about it a'. The last day or two he's been like a man on stilts, no certain whether he's up or doon."

"Is Miss Iona alone?"

Hamish nodded his head several times.

"Aye, but she's had company the day. Yon English—it's no the first crack he's hed wi' her, Miss Christina or no Miss Christina."

"Mr. Manning?"

"That same and them baith singin' like chaffinches taegither. Not, mind ye, that I begrudge the lassie—"

"Hold your tongue," he said sharply, a deep flush mounting to his cheeks. "That is no affair of mine—or yours."

To his credit Hamish was in no degree angered or silenced.

"I'm no misjudgin' ye, Maister Parish," he said genially, "and we all ken finely hoo it is wi' ye. Sheila——"

"How it is with me?" echoed the minister discomposed.

The butler drew back a pace, and nodded with shrewd benevolence.

"Who's no quick wi' the tongue at these times," he said handsomely, and squeaked away down the corridor.

John Parish listened to the sound of his footsteps

dying away. So they all knew, did they? Was his state of mind not only the gossip of the kitchen but were the Miss Macdougalls also interested spectators? Did the Laird know?

From a great distance there sounded the thud of a door, and still he stood, one hand gripping the rail of the banister, and stared upon the floor.

Why had Iona asked him to be so sure to come early? What was it she wanted to say to him? Could it be—he shook his head quickly. The thought was beyond belief. Then might she wish to lessen the blow, to tell him she had never realised his love? There was reason there—that was the course Iona would surely take.

He had not looked for this, and his courage was gone out of him. He knew himself to be standing on the threshold of some tragic discovery, and recoiled from it, with the paralysed indecision of a man schooled for many years to follow the line of least resistance. Things might happen within that room up there that would alter everything. It had become his rule in life to postpone settling matters of any urgency until the morning, when they became harmless or unnecessary, or, if ignored, ceased in time to exist at all. Then, remembering her message to him, he set foot upon the stairway and mounted with a heavy heart.

She was sitting by the window when he entered, and when she saw him a sudden flush either of pleasure or relief rose to her cheeks and she ran towards him with outstretched hands.

"I knew you would come," she cried. "You good Mr. John."

"Only too glad, Iona. I hope there is nothing amiss."

She made no reply, but, still clasping his hand between her cool slight fingers, led him to her father's great chair, and seated herself upon a low stool opposite.



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"There," she said. "Now you must be very wise, Mr. John—wise and sensible, as you always are."

Something in her playful tone, something perhaps in the substance of the place where he was seated, awkwardly enough, moved him to reply with the ghost of a laugh:

"I dislike my reputation, Iona."

"With all those papers bulging in your pocket you might be an advocate."

He faltered and laid a hand on the large envelope.

"Perhaps I am," he said with a nervous smile. "I brought them to show you. But first what's all the trouble?"

A curious expression of bewilderment and pain crossed her face and all the momentary happiness died away.

"It's father," she said simply.

"Oh—tell me."

"There's something on his mind—something he tries to hide from me. I don't think Aunt Chris and Aunt Jean notice it, at least they've said nothing to me, but I'm *miserable*, Mr. John, wondering whether anything's wrong—badly wrong. Not knowing what it can be. There are so few things affect father—only two really."

"And they?"

"Garroch and—and me—just me."

John Parish stirred in his chair.

"How could it be you, Iona?"

"Because I wonder what Sir Joseph Preston really said. Yet father was in good spirits—for a time. Since then a kind of shadow has been falling deeper and deeper over him. Sometimes he is like his old self. But yesterday——"

"Yes."

"I was with him when the post came. He snatched up a letter, tore it open and he went quite grey, Mr.

John—as though he were very ill. When I spoke to him he only stared at me, and left the room without a word. What is it—whatever can be wrong?”

John Parish had heard rumours, had often wondered himself. There were the ominous words of Hamish. . . .

“I sometimes feel,” she went on mournfully, “that soon we will leave Garroch for ever, and everyone knows except myself. Are you in the secret too—do you know whether father is worried about something?” She looked at him miserably, and when he faltered for a reply the look of pain and dread grew in her eyes, and cried out for his denial.

“I am in no secret, Iona,” he replied. “You are over-strung. Fancy speaking of leaving Garroch.”

“It would kill me. My life and Inverclover are one, aren’t they? Haven’t you always said so—if only in fun. Is that why father is worried? Is it, Mr. John? Is there no way of always staying here, whatever happened?”

At those words despairingly uttered John Parish heard as it were the cry of his own vain love. How might she always stay in Inverclover? How might she withstand even the downfall of Garroch? Surely there was a way very dear to him, and had not the hour struck that was to unite his life and hers?

“Have you nothing to say, Mr. John?” she pleaded, leaning forward, her tragic eyes turned up to him so that had he bent he could have kissed her lips.

Nothing to say—he had a world to say. A rush of blood flooded his cheeks and ebbed away. He knew in his heart that she was there for the claiming, that were he to snatch her into his arms she would cling to him and cry out her loneliness upon his breast. He knew all that, but drew back his hands knowing also in his anguish that she was only a child for all her eighteen years. God help him, he would not win her so desperately as that.



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Even as he sought for words there came a low knocking at the door, and Hamish stood on the threshold.

"Mr. Manning, Miss Iona," he said, "but he can bide his time. He is wi' Miss Jean."

John Parish rose.

"You will trust me, Iona."

She replied nothing for a moment, searching his face for his meaning.

"To see that you are happy," he added.

They passed down the corridor and so into the hall.

From the drawing-room came the sound of music. At the foot of the stairs she stopped, laying one hand upon his arm.

"If I want you, you will do what you can, Mr. John?"

"I will always do what I can."

III

There was David discussing Miss Jean's songs with her at the piano, giving inordinate pleasure to the old lady who refused persistently to meet the scornful stare Miss Christina had levelled upon her for the last five minutes. There was the Colonel in extraordinary evening clothes, with a thumb-marked cream coloured waistcoat, and strange elastic-sided boots. There was Miss Christina overwhelming in her black dress, and the pearls of her great-aunt Hagar around her neck.

"Leave the door open, Iona," she said. "Your father is coming. How do you do, Mr. Parish. Where is Mrs. Lamont?"

He stammered out some hurried apologies, said something about his sister being ill, just as though Miss Christina could be expected to understand such frailties.

David and Miss Jean left the piano, and joining the circle about the fire Miss Jean suddenly abandoned her innocent liveliness. She stood beside Iona. The

Colonel was watching the doorway while John Parish, having gripped David's hand, seemed overtaken by some private reflection. Only Miss Christina, erect, a figure of profound enduring silence, seemed at her ease, heedless of all around her. And over that group, stationary in that deeply affecting room, there fell an unutterable silence. To David they stood like people waiting breathlessly some melancholy spectacle, as long since royalists, behind half-shuttered windows, might have marked, with tragic gaze, the passing of Montrose.

At last afar off there sounded a slow step coming across the hall, pausing on the threshold, coming inevitably on. In the doorway stood James Grahame, dressed in his faded kilt, a yellow sporran streaming towards his knees. The light shone full upon his thin bearded face upheld in a kind of touching acquiescence with Fate, as was the face of Charles Stuart upon a sad January morning in Whitehall. His grey eyes glanced quickly from one to the other of those he knew until they lit on David, where they rested. Coming forward he bowed and then, as with an effort, extended his hand.

"How do you do?" he said, and, turning abruptly, walked a little up the room and back again.

Hamish entered the door at that moment just as the jester used to cut a caper in cruder days.

"The soup's away through the hall, Miss Christina," he said.

At that they all moved across the hall, and into the dining-room, a long narrow place with a lofty ceiling.

The impenetrable silence that had fallen upon them in the drawing-room was beside them still. It passed from one face to another like a secret countersign, out of which the squeaking of Hamish's shoes cried out intolerably. At one end of the table sat Miss Christina—at the other the Laird. Upon the right of Miss



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Christina was John Parish, with the Colonel and Miss Jean. On the opposite side of the table sat David and Iona.

"I hear," said Miss Christina politely, "that Dr. Dumble is coming, Mr. Parish."

"I'm glad to say he is. The church will be very full, I expect."

"It's a good thing people go sometimes," snapped Miss Christina. "Church attendance is no what it was. More soup, Mr. Manning. Hamish, the soup."

"And yet people are not antagonistic—there's always comfort there."

Miss Christina was not prepared to be comforted.

"It's because they don't care one way or the other. Not like the old days of the Disruption. Wasn't it old Doctor MacNab, Jean, whose coffin was dumped at his doorstep, plate and all filled in, and him no feeling very well at the time. It gave the old man quite a turn, they said."

"If people don't feel the need of Church I suppose they won't go," hazarded David, feeling in the cold.

"But they should feel the need," decided Miss Christina.

The Laird roused himself a moment.

"What are they saying, Jean?" he enquired.

"They're speaking about church attendance, James."

"Oh, that's it," said he indifferently, and relapsed into his former preoccupation.

"The day will come," prophesied Miss Christina with grim satisfaction, "when they'll wish they'd given more attention to sacred things."

"And yet," deliberated John Parish, "that might drive them away from the Church altogether—unless," he hesitated, pondering a moment, "unless the Church met them half-way."

"How could that be?" ventured Miss Jean.

"I don't know," he admitted helplessly, "but there is

a feeling we are rather conservative—rather too ecclesiastical. What do you think, Manning?"

David had never given the problem prolonged meditation. He had a vision of the rush for College chapel, pyjamas thrust profanely into flannel trousers.

"For mercy's sake tak' a heed to what ye say, boy," whispered the Colonel in what he imagined was an inaudible aside.

"I can't see what difference it makes," said David confusedly, "whether one sits in church or sits at home."

Miss Christina tightened her mouth. She took a slice of chicken with a steady hand.

"I mean," blundered on David unhappily and panic-stricken by the absolute attention of the table, the warning frown of the Colonel, and the horrified gaze of Hamish—"I mean hymns, 'dearly beloveds,' and everything are only an institution. They're nothing to do with religion as religion. They convey nothing to me. I don't see why they should."

"You mean," rushed in John Parish to avert the blow, "that the order of worship has lost its inspiration and become tedious. That may be true in England, but in the North we counteract that tendency by longer sermons and extempore prayers. I think our churches are better attended——"

"But still," pursued David, mistaking Miss Christina's silence and feeling he was doing surprisingly well, "if there is anything in it at all it shouldn't be possible to chop and change. Otherwise why not do away with the present form of things altogether. If people find it boring——"

"My God," groaned the Colonel, "he's done it now."

"What's the boy saying?" asked the Laird, addressing Iona.

"It's about Church worship," she said in a dubious voice.

"Heaven help us," snapped her father irritably, "is this house a divinity hall."



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Miss Christina took no notice of the irreverence of the old school. She was concentrating where there was yet hope. She had not lost her temper. She was in that historic and sorrowful mood when a stake used to ease the tension of religious differences. She was also aware that Hamish hovered in the shadows of the side-board breathing Jesuitical psalms of joy and thankfulness.

The moment was at hand.

"I'll grant ye," she said, "Christianity cannot hope to compete with the theatre."

There was a sudden irruption from the other end of the table.

"Christina, leave the boy alone. I'll not have him harried."

"James!"

But the Laird was off on his own peculiar line of thought. Already he had forgotten the whole matter. There is a providence comes to aid the very old or very young.

"Religion is the devil," said he, brightening up. "Look at the Irish news to-day. Saw ye ever the like of it. I have always abominated the Irish," he added, "Protestants and Papists alike—and by the grace of God I always will. A bragging, thriftless, troublesome, traitorous race—just a parcel of fools and knaves."

"Aye," rejoined the Colonel, muttering oaths of gratitude for this splendid interruption, "aye, but where would we have been without Roberts, eh? Ye mind Candahar."

"Tuts," parried the Laird, "where would he have been without the Seaforths and the Gordons. A bonny march he'd have had, and a bonny termination."

"Do you think," remarked John Parish with the air of a broad-minded man who is anxious to be impartial, "that the Irish business will come to anything?"

"Something ought to be done," persisted the Laird crossly.

"But what could be done? Surely the great thing is to trust to the common sense of people, who are, after all, just as reasonable as ourselves—it seems to me one scare follows another, and yet when you look back over the last ten years what has happened?"

"I suppose," broke in Colonel Gask, speaking as it were from the centuries, "I've seen something o' the world—at least that's my opinion. I mind in the frontier troubles of '64 there was a sair noise about the tribes, but och it was all wind—all wind."

"But what of the Mutiny," said David tellingly.

"I was'na there," retorted the Colonel, "so I canna say."

"I once met a man in the Secret Service," resumed John Parish, to clinch the matter, "and he told me that there are no international secrets—none. After all that is their work."

"The whole question," said the Laird with the sudden fire of an old man, "dates back to the depopulation of the land. We live or perish by the land. A hundred years ago this glen of Clover could raise a thousand able-bodied men. To-day it would be ill put to it to find a dozen."

"And then they would not be armed," added John Parish, lighting a cigar.

"The British Army," said the Coloney stiffly, "is surely equal to continental conscripts."

"After all it's only a small force," returned David, feeling the cloud of age deepening against him and likely to submerge him altogether.

The Colonel's retort was magnificent.

"My dear lad," he said, with his discomposing air of omniscience, "did they no teach ye the name o' Waterloo at your schooling."

That, of course, was overwhelming. Even the Laird sunk in memories of past glories, nodded his approval.

"Besides," said John Parish, from the awful complacency of the forties, "an island is an island."



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“Yes, thank God,” repeated the Laird from the serenity of the seventies.

At that they all rose and, crossing the hall, re-entered the drawing-room.

IV

In the drawing-room when they entered Miss Christina was lighting the candles on the piano. It was an understood thing that she would sing one of her favourite songs. It was also an unwritten law that other persons, and particularly Miss Jean, must be prepared to smother any personal hopes or ambitions unless commanded to perform. Iona was sitting beside Miss Jean, and as David approached the fire she rose and, going softly to the far corner of the room, stood beside Miss Christina, who was even now sounding massive chords in the bass. Colonel Gask, greatly warmed with port, headed for Miss Jean, leaving the Laird and David to sit together upon the other side of the fire.

John Parish, who had longed for this moment, trudged up the room to where Iona stood.

In a low mournful contralto Miss Christina sang “Robin Adair.” The familiar melody softened the sadness that brooded over the old people gathered about the fire, recalling memories of other days and other voices. But to David it was only the singing of an unknown song by a strange old lady, and very soon he forgot it altogether through looking at Iona in the candle-light. For him, as for his kind, glamour was dimly sensible in the pages of a book, or viewed impartially from the darkened rows of the stalls. It was a thing apart from hockey, dances, bridge, and the acknowledged security of the twentieth century. And yet, in a baffling fashion, watching Iona standing in the candle-light, he was more moved than ever before, solemnised, troubled. He looked uneasily at James Grahame, at Colonel Gask, at Miss Jean. Upon

their faces, aged, wrinkled, was written something that was significant and yet obscure. They were so different from the sort of people he had known—that was as far as he could reach. They were restrained, stronger, born with steadfast loves and hates, not traders upon casual emotions.

Miss Christina came slowly down the room, leaving Iona at the piano. David jumping up, hastened to turn her music, but finding John Parish already moving out of the darkness he halted irresolutely and remained in the shadow.

She touched a note or two and sang in a low untrained voice words that David could but dimly understand, but which fell like tears into that hushed room:

“Oh, the auld hoose, the auld hoose!
What tho’ the rooms were wee?
Oh, kind hearts were dwelling there,
And bairnies fu’ o’ glee!
The wild rose and the jessamine
Still hang upon the wa’;
How mony cherish’d memories
Do they sweet flowers reca’?”

She paused, and David forgot everything but the infinite sadness of her voice, and the way her eyes glistened like stars.

When it was over and Iona had risen he made a little movement just to thank her in the customary way. But for once no words came. He remained fumbling for commonplaces until she passed him, and with her John Parish. Then again he looked at the four old people upon whom fell the searching yellow flame. They sat perfectly motionless, with faces of stone. James Grahame was staring with stricken eyes into the heart of the fire, but to David his profile was immobile, like a death mask. It was Miss Christina who rose and, standing between the Laird and David, remarked, ‘To-morrow week

Dr. Dumble preaches—perhaps you have not heard him, Mr. Manning."

David shook his head.

"Shall I come," he asked ingenuously.

Miss Christina was taken aback. But for some unfathomable reason she was acquiescent.

"Come with us," she said.

"I meant with you," returned David honestly.

Very slowly James Grahame rose to his feet.

"I will wish you good night, Mr. Manning," he said quietly. He expressed no desire to meet again, made no mention of a pleasant evening, inferred neither in gesture nor speech that their paths were ever likely to cross in this world or the next. Then with the same slow dignity he passed from the room and again they heard his footsteps in the hall, but this time sounding into silence.

Colonel Gask nudged David, and, thanking the Miss Macdougalls for a rare evening, hurried away for his coat.

David shook the hands of the old ladies and John Parish very heartily, and, turning to Iona, bent his head, for she barely reached his shoulder. "Thank you," he said.

She looked at him questioningly as might a child.

"For your singing," he added with haste, and went abruptly out of the room.

From the far end of the avenue John Parish saw the glow of a pipe in the darkness. Hurrying onwards he was confronted by the gaunt inscrutability of James.

"Anything wrong," he asked quickly, knowing the gardener lived four miles distant.

"It's yon Saunders the grocer body. I feel kin' of sorry for the wee man," he concluded apologetically.

"I don't understand."

"He cam' the morn, ye mind."

John Parish gave a sombre whistle.

"So he did—so he did—but he left no message. I would have gone but I was busy."

James took a pull at his pipe.

"I know—in fact I said to him, 'D'ye no ken the meenister's at his sermon?' But he only spoke about his wife being deid—leastways it sounded like deid, but yon Saunders always talks as though he were laughin', though I've never discovered ony humour in onything he says."

"*Dead*—his wife dead—when?"

"I canna juist say—but I feel kin' o' sorry for the wee mon, him with seven bairns an' no gran' consteetution."

"Of course, James, I'm sorry too."

"An' I thocht I'd give ye a call as it micht be weel—though everybody kens finely Saunders is no orthodox," he added, smoking quickly.

"He should have left a message," repeated John Parish. How could he know by instinct when a man's wife was dying?

"Aye," agreed the gardener, "there's no question one should be expleecit, though it's a pity. Mrs. Lamont is there the now."

"Mrs. Lamont?"

"Aye, when I cam' she answered the bell—Mrs. Grant being in bed, ye ken—an' away she went to see what could be done."

"But there's nothing can be done at eleven o'clock at night."

"She's gone, ony road."

There was something about James, puffing his pipe, judicial and unperturbed, singularly irritating. He stood there uttering guarded comments with a kind of mournful relish, just as though he took no sides in another's affairs but could not as an honest man refrain from a word in season.

"I think you had better be off home, James," said



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John Parish sharply, and without another word unlocked the front door and shut it behind him.

In his bedroom was a little pan and a jug, covered with the bottom of the soap-dish. Also a scrap of paper on which was written in ink and carefully blotted, “Set a match to the wick, and warm the milk. Do not wait up as you will be tired. Annie.”

Was ever a woman more aggravating?

He sat down and began to unloose his boots, dislodging the bundle of estimates from his coat-pocket. Falling upon the carpet they lay beside Annie’s little note. He regarded them both with great bitterness, then tying his boots again went tediously out of the room and down the stairs.



CHAPTER XIII

ROMANCE

I

THE Colonel was standing in the garden when David came up the path from the inn. It was three o'clock and a perfect summer day. The clear blue of the sky over which a little convoy of feathery clouds travelled like white yachts across a southern sea, was reflected in the serene face of Loch Clover. The rugged shoulder of Ben Calder drove upwards with its thin summit cut sharply against the sky-line as chiselled spires of an Italian church are etched upon a background of blue. The placid rays of the afternoon sun were caught and set like diamonds in a thousand rocks of pigeon-grey, and falling upon the foliage of the lower reaches cast long cool shadows to which the deer would presently come. From the moorland between Drumcairn and the Manse arose no sound at all. The sheep lay in hollowed shelves of bank upon which the heather was turning to crimson. At remote intervals against the bronze and red and ageless grey, a brown convoy of grouse sped like a passing cloud and were lost again in the encompassing loneliness.

To David fresh from Cambridge, from London, from years devoted to the study of subjects remote from life (even the life of commerce), there was no touchstone to set free the incoherency that mounted and stood waiting in his heart. The beauty of the Classics had been hidden



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from him by the weary road that leads to Parnassus. There were verbs to learn, passages to be recited like the alphabet, translations by the profane secured their wretched market, banal textbooks by one headmaster or another crushed any lingering spark of the divine fire. It was only the indomitable, the unquenchable, or the elect who could give rein to the things that thumped in their brains like piston rods.

Nor was he of those who, because of their parents or some accident, can match the majesty of Nature with the grandeur of English verse. For Francis Manning knew nothing of Wordsworth and would most certainly have regarded his influence as pernicious and unremunerative.

David also stood remote from the happy ones who do not venture on Virgil or Wordsworth but who carry a gun or a rod or even a butterfly net, not as the cr-de cry out, to slaughter the innocent—for these are the stockbrokers with driven birds for Smithfield—but with an eye for the spot where the “royal” is lying up wind, or the pool where the salmon is awaiting a spate, or the rock where the Red Admiral spreads his gorgeous wings.

Until he came to Inverclover David had known nothing of these things. His father hated the country, with a splendid rational hatred, knowing it for a place where there was nothing profitable to do, and where the telegraph service was a disgrace to any civilised land.

II

The Colonel lit a cheroot, and, limping over to the window, stared down the glen.

“I’m afraid Miss Macdougall’s no what she was,” he said. “Last night gave me an awfu’ turn.”

“I like her,” returned David; “she’s very quiet, isn’t she?”

"*Quiet!*" echoed the Colonel with emphasis. "Man, that's good."

"I hope I didn't upset her about church going."

"*Upset her,*" repeated the Colonel, "he hopes he didn't upset Christina—go on, boy, dinna halt, it's no often I attend theatricals."

"I saw you making signs to me so I knew I must be putting my foot in it. But Miss Macdougall said nothing."

The Colonel switched round.

"That's the point," he cried, "she said nothing. Now why did she say nothing? What's come to Christina?"

"Mr. Grahame——"

"Huts, boy, when ye ken Miss Christina better ye'll know that the Laird's like a cockle on a spate—he juist gaes bobbin' away. No," he pondered reflectively, "I've lain awake the night askin' mysel' 'what ailed the woman—what kept her tongue still?' For, mark ye, Manning, she was sairly tempted."

"Of course, I'm a stranger," David pointed out.

"Stranger," snorted the Colonel, jealous for the prestige of Miss Macdougall, "stranger be damned."

He shook his head.

"There's a reason," he said, "but she's deep, me boy, deep. She'll no forget, don't imagine that—she'll open fire on ye some day, but for the moment she is prepared to hold off. But why? Why? Why?" He spat with accuracy into the fire, "Ye might as weel ask Calder," he said decisively.

In a deep and mystified silence the Colonel opened a cupboard, produced an enormous decanter, a lemon showing signs of decomposition, and two heavy tumblers. These he set down upon a table littered with pipes, tobacco lying loose and covered with dust, and an old copy of the "Scotsman" chalked indignantly in several places.

"Help yirsel', Manning, me boy."

"I'm sorry, Colonel, but I never drink whisky—at least I couldn't now."

"Not—but that's no just whisky, Manning—and this is no a station bar. That's no the stuff folk try to kill the bite—aye an' the bark—wi' a gallon o' cold water. This," said the Colonel reverently, pouring out a portion and drinking it neat, "is a privilege, Manning. It's no a question o' yir principles or yir stomach."

"I'm awfully sorry, Colonel, but——"

"As ye were, then—as ye were. These ceegars are no ordinary ceegars," handing David a box of black cigars about a foot in length and of generous girth.

"Thanks frightfully," he said, "but I only smoke a pipe."

The Colonel was visibly displeased.

"As ye will," he said gruffly. "Times change. I mind my Aunt Phoebe smoking sax o' thae ceegars between ten in a nicht an' four in the dawnin' an' winning twa pund into the bargain. But fill yir pipe—the 'baccys a gran' plug I was given by Captain Menzies of the Navy. He was six foot an' married a Spaniard—the kind o' body ye don't see hereabouts wi' a humour for carrying a knife—stiletty they ca' it—in her hose."

Having permitted himself this fragrant reminiscence the Colonel laughed in his peculiar fashion, and just as though what delighted him was not the anecdote at all but something quite different and perhaps not so far from David.

"I was glad to come, sir," began David laboriously and, taking a pull at his pipe, removed it hastily in an eloquent silence.

"That's plug for ye," remarked the Colonel, who was an optimist in these matters.

"I was on the point of thanking you," said David, "for your kindness about Garroch. It's been awfully good of you."

"Nonsense, my boy—sheer nonsense. It's been a pleasure, though, mind ye, I'm a busy man—awfu' busy. Maybe ye noticed the 'Scotsman' there wi' a' thae red

dabs o' chalk. Maybe ye said: 'What kind o' capers are yon.' Well, listen here. Ye micht jump to the notion that I was oot o' the world—just an auld body hard put to it to mind the kitten's milk. I'm no—I tell ye—I'm no."

"I'm sure you're not," said David heartily, "and as I was about to say——"

"A meenit, my boy. Hark here." The Colonel leaned forward and with an expression of enormous gravity tapped David upon the knee with a neglected forefinger. "When I see a point in print that calls for a challenge, a speech by some Radical creature, or a plot to steal the Highland water for Glasgow, I am rushed *terribly*, Manning, *terribly*. Maybe ye've noticed my letters."

"No," said David, "I'm afraid——"

"I'll show ye some," said the Colonel. "Here's one they printed."

"Don't they always?" asked David rather thoughtlessly.

The Colonel rallied.

"They *daren't*, Manning," he said with a shake of his head, "when I'm warmed up I'm a deevil—a *hot ane*." He fumbled about a moment. "Manning," said he, "the other night I mentioned my brother—just casual like, ye mind. It's curious, but I laid my hand on the picture accidental. But there's no interest in the thing," he added hurriedly and began to thrust it away.

David went over to him. In the Colonel's hands was the portrait of a young man with curly golden hair, clear blue eyes, a fresh and happy face.

"That's Malcolm," he remarked, "that's my twin brother. Once folk could'na tell us apart." He handed the battered black frame to David, and pulled more rapidly at his cheroot.

"He and I were awfu' close friends," he said with a faint laugh. "He was about your height an' build, Manning; fair like you. I noticed the likeness the day ye were fishing the Clover water." He bent and raked



amongst an open box where he evidently kept his little treasures.

"There's a miniature o' my mother, Manning," he went on, "an' a lock o' her hair on the other side. She was a fine woman, quick in the temper but sound, me boy, every inch o' her an' proud—God save us, ye don't see her match to-day. Twelve in a family gives ye small time for jockeying about theatres an' buying new clothes. I can hear her sayin', as clear the now as seventy years ago, 'Andie, here's yir penny for the plate an' dinna clink it like a keelie.' Dod, but she could land ye a crack on the lug, my mother."

David looked again upon the miniature, at the serene composure of the strong Highland face, the shrewd friendly blue eyes, the beautiful hair parted in the centre and falling in wringlets over the bare shoulders and neck. The Colonel spoke true words—this was a woman to revere, a type seldom come by to-day. More than that, a memory to be treasured, harboured up, recalled in seasons of solitude and sorrow. When a man could no longer look forward—he was fortunate if he could look back. Standing there while the Colonel crouched over his box of broken relics, fondling them with tender hands, David looked into his own youth and returned empty-handed, turned to the future when he, even as the Colonel, might be utterly alone and forgotten, and knew that he would be as a shattered brig wandering haplessly at sea, finding no anchorage. . . .

When they were seated again he determined to express thoughts that had formed laboriously in his mind since last evening. He too had lain wide-eyed in the night.

"Colonel Gask," he began, "will you listen to me a moment?"

"What is it?" asked the Colonel reluctantly.

"It's—it's about Garroch. I wanted to tell you last night when we left, but you were speaking of other things and I didn't like to interrupt."

The Colonel had again returned to the hearthrug and was regarding his grandfather with apprehension.

"The fact of the matter is this," continued David, speaking in an off-hand manner, "these people don't want to leave that house."

"I imagine they ought to be the best judges o' what they want," said the Colonel, considerably startled.

"Surely you see what I mean. To my sort of people, houses, ancestors, songs, even religion—all that sort of thing—mean no more than a suit of clothes. We are content with our own personalities and I won't deny they're jolly thin. I don't say all these other things are more use than a box of curios—I don't know—but if they produce people like the Grahames there's something jolly wrong with the rest of us."

The Colonel pondered upon these reflections.

"I suppose," said he, "ye speak for yir father?"

David looked hard at him.

"No—hardly—but——"

"Go on."

"I think I can persuade him to give up the idea—if he really is keen on the place."

The Colonel chewed his cheroot savagely. "See here, my boy. Should the Laird tell ye that it would be a godsend to him to get Garroch off his hands—how would that suit ye?"

"To some extent, but it is not the Laird I am thinking about. If Miss Grahame——" He hesitated and relapsed into silence.

The Colonel pondered again, and permitted himself a droop of one eye in the direction of his grandfather, who persisted, as always, in maintaining a fixed and glassy benevolence. Then, rising without further comment, he sauntered over to the window.

"Well I declare," he said with an extravagant air of astonishment, "if that's not Iona Grahame on her pony."

David scrambled to his feet and looked out upon the



descending lawn. At the gateway a shaggy deerhound was passing in as majestically as in a mediæval picture, his long muzzle lifted above the frantic demonstration of the Colonel's terriers. He advanced sedately, looking neither to right nor left, and behind him in a simple green habit with a wide sun hat and leading a strong pony, came Iona, holding up her skirt with one gloved hand. There was a stone post inside the gate with an iron ring, over which she slipped her single rein, and loosening the girths patted the little dogs and caught up a kitten in her arms.

All this David watched as one might view a pageant from a shaded place upon a matchless summer day. A moment and she was coming into the house, into the room, talking in her low musical voice to Colonel Gask, laughing a little at something he had said. The vision of her entering that room silhouetted as she was between the dark sides of the low doorway remained with David as though it were engraved upon his brain. She did not see him for a moment, but when she did she gave him a little friendly smile, the smile of a child playing in a lonely garden. . . .

It was a great afternoon for the Colonel, who had secured at last an attentive and deeply silent audience. Seated one on each side of him so that they could (and did) steal fugitive glances instantly transferred, David and Iona were in a position to hear more about "the auld forty-twa," about Major Macpherson, whom the Colonel protested was the wittiest fellow in the Service, and proved it by at least four atrocious puns, about the duel the Colonel nearly fought but didn't, and a host of other wonderful subjects that had not to be cajoled from the old gentleman but came ever faster like water breaking through a dam. It was a most fortunate occasion for sensible people, who could have treasured priceless relics of the past, and referred to the narrator half a century later with all the impressive solemnity of persons only two links from the '45.

But David and Iona listened not at all. Had Colonel Gask not been fully aware of this wretched state of things it would have shocked him inexpressibly. But as it was it was all he could manage not to relapse into a paroxysm of secret laughter and ruin everything.

III

The Colonel accompanied them to the gate, and unfastened Iona's pony. Then on a ledge that overlooked the glen, his retainers about his feet, he stood with the sunset upon his ancient face and the evening breeze tossing the straggly locks of his white hair. They waved to him every hundred yards partly because he never moved, partly for something to do since bright and serviceable conversation at these precious but agitating times is only the happy possession of young people in fiction.

At last a steep descent in the road shut off the Colonel from their sight, and when they looked back again at the bend of the slope he had gone indoors. Before them, returning as he had come, went Druid, the deerhound, pausing now and again to wind the cool air with his fine muzzle, scenting one cannot say what trails of deer and the lean foxes of Calder.

Over the glen still hung the spell of that wonderful day. But already the end was approaching, the afterglow was fading from crimson to orange and orange to the pale lemon beauty that is caught up so swiftly into the pearl greyness of twilight. Over the loch was a faint ripple as though the spirit of the water were roused from slumber. Across the western breast of Calder, shadows marched boldly carrying long spears.

"This is the way they came after Culloden," said Iona. David knew nothing of Culloden, but he knew that by such a road hunted men must once have passed leaving the trail of their tragedy for ever in their passing.



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"They dared all and they fought every inch," she added wistfully, "and at that rock the last Grahame fell. He died laughing. It's a great chance for a man when he can prove himself—a chance seldom come by."

"Not nowadays. I say . . ."

She looked at him suddenly as a mother might turn her eyes upon her son.

"I shall remember what you said—about proving oneself. Playing the game, you mean."

"If you like."

"You mean it's bigger than that?"

"It isn't a game," she said in a troubled voice, "it's life and death, isn't it, and what follows after?"

The night was racing past them covering up the hollows of the hills, sweeping the pallor from the sky, painting darkly the surface of loch and running water.

In the silence that followed her words he drew nearer to her saddle-bow and laid a hand upon the shaggy neck of the pony. Quickening their pace they approached the Clover Woods as the first silver twilight of the moon rested upon a new world and lit up a heaven of cold stars. From the heart of the trees before them the plaintive note of the bagpipes rose from Colin's hollow. It was obliterated and rose again clearer, one prevailing high and abiding note—the tuning of the drones.

David looked up at Iona but she said nothing, only smiling at him, the reins lying slackly on her pony's withers.

There came a chord twice repeated and presently with a mournful insistence rang out the opening bars of a pibroch, old as Calder, old as the Gael, passing from hand to hand down the march of history. In their challenge was the voice of the wind blowing darkly, the cry of the eagle, the drumming of innumerable waters. But there was more than that, for at the heart of it all was the soul of a people living remotely, dying with silent lips, walking into the twilight of the past and the future.

They went downwards and the passionate roar of it



surged and sobbed and all the world stood still. Over the sky a cloud was passing shaped like a sword. It hung heavy with doom above the summit of Calder. Suddenly as they reached the corner of the road it blotted out the frail light, and they drew closer, feeling the uncertain path. Dimly, in a glade beneath them, they saw the dark figure of a man alone in the night, playing of things lost in eternity and all around him the trees standing perpetually, and the reeds by the loch from which his music came, bending for ever in the wind. . . .

To Iona, as they parted, David said nothing of the things that thronged his mind, but only thanked her and held her cold hand for a moment, and went quickly into the night.

In the "Calder Arms" was a letter from his father, brief as always, dictated, and stating that he would be in New York for four days and then return. Already he was speeding homeward. Faced by his father's familiar, minute, and careful signature, David's new world, so frail, so tender when confronted like this, seemed to vanish like smoke and the real world in which one has to live, if only for three score years and ten, to fling open the door and enter.



CHAPTER XIV

DRAWN BLINDS

I

ABOUT ten o'clock on Tuesday night there was a low knock upon the door of Archie Saunders, "the man wi' views." He was standing in the shop waiting. Into the passage two men carried a coffin. Carefully closing the door, Archie pointed up the stairs. When they halted at the top, their shadows enormous against his flickering candle, he opened his mouth twice and then without speaking gave a jerk with his arm. They lurched on and disappeared. Next minute he heard their heavy feet returning down the stair, and, standing in the shadow of the street door, shut it quickly as they went into the darkness. He remained in the shop idling about the counter, and then lighting his pipe removed his shoes and stole upstairs. In the room where his wife Jean lay two candles were burning beside the bed. He halted on the threshold of the door and fingering his pipe for a moment shoved it in his pocket. He looked at the thin tired face of the dead woman, her worn hands lying upon her breast, then at the coffin standing upon two chairs. It was as if he had not been able to associate the two before, as though had he remained below he would have been haunted by some overwhelming curiosity or incredulity. He did not cross the threshold, but remained in the shadow of the doorway, a man not old in years but of diminutive stock, warped in body as in mind.

In the room behind him the children were asleep. With the same air of detachment he turned the handle of the door where they lay in two large beds and craned his head round the edge. Since their mother's death he had given them a night-light. It stood upon the washstand, the tiny flame burning steadily. In the same careful fashion he closed the door again and went downstairs into the parlour. It was brighter there. Taking out his pipe he scratched a match, and sat down upon a hard deal chair. The room was poorly furnished with a table, three chairs, a cheap clock, a horsehair sofa. On a shelf to the right of the mantelpiece were two or three dozen books and tracts devoted to the propagation of "free thought." Archie Saunders was a sceptic, not so proud of it as when he came from Glasgow to Inverclover, but still ready to challenge any person who imagined that there was anything in life but chaos and anything after life but extinction. In Glasgow his select coterie had reckoned him "an awfu' smart felly," but in Inverclover, where folk are slower of tongue and suspicious of lively convictions, Archie was examined with contempt or pity—both galling attitudes to the man whose ambition is that of a sky rocket, stars included. For the way of the professional cynic is like the road of the martyrs—exceeding rough for ordinary men.

At dawn Archie left the couch where he had lain awake throughout the darkest hours, and, tearing a newspaper, broke some pieces of wood and lit a fire. Again he felt his way upstairs. In the room where Jean lay the candles had burned to their sockets. In the twilight of the cold dawning he took courage and moving like a shadow across the worn carpet stood for a moment by the bed looking down.

The drawn blind had rucked at one side, so that a single ray of grey light rested upon his wife's clothes neatly folded and laid upon a chair. Either because its untidiness distracted him or because he must persist in

doing little things, he went over and released the blind gently, making no noise. Then leaving the room he returned downstairs again and, putting the kettle on the fire, brought the tea-things from the kitchen and laid the cloth. . . .

Even when all was ready and the sound of children's feet thumped on the thin floor above, he had two hours to fill in before breakfast. The day was now fully come, and peering cautiously from under the shop blinds he could see how steadily the rain was falling upon the empty street of Inverclover. With a shiver he straightened himself and lighting his pipe wandered into the parlour, pausing once at the foot of the stairs.

II

At the doorway of Saunders' house the group of melancholy figures awful in ancient blacks and obsolete top-hats gathered beneath a sullen and oppressive heaven, opened to let the minister pass within, and without a word resumed their vigil and stared with grim, weather-beaten faces into space. In the High Street dwelt an absolute silence as it might be in a deserted village. Only once a conveyance passed slowly down, and the driver, feeling in some way guilty of an indiscretion, looked neither to right nor left but glared steadfastly at his horses' ears, the rain dripping with slanting spires from the brim of his hat.

Inside the parlour John Parish shook Saunders by the hand, and clearing his throat laid his hat upon the couch and sat down. Upon the table were some plain cakes, whisky, and a number of glasses.

For a moment, upon his entry, some semblance of life had carried them both through a silent greeting, but again the presence of death breathed through the hushed house with its fallen blinds, and occasional whimpering of children shut in their room and deeply scared. To John Parish it was all familiar enough, it had been since his

Edinburgh days when first, as a nervous third year student, he had struggled for words beside the bed of an ancient and indifferent mendicant. The dreary panoply of death affected him hardly at all. Such things must be. But the sight of Saunders, white-faced, secretive, affecting something of his old satirical manner, anxious above all to make a good show before those terrible figures on the threshold when, as custom ordained, they must enter the house and partake of refreshment—all this was disturbing and unbecoming. Unbecoming because John Parish was one of those methodical if indolent men who like to believe human nature and human faith run like some sluggish river between recognised though shallow banks. He brooded for a moment upon these things, while Saunders, sitting upon a broken chair near the fire, stared intently at a faded blue flower on the wallpaper, fighting down the voice that cried for comfort and the living hope, crushing it back so that his limbs trembled, driven deeper into his tragic loneliness by the thought of what lay ahead, and the watchers on the threshold.

John Parish touched him on the arm.

"Let us pray together," he said with the awful solemnity of persons seeking not comfort or understanding but a vague forgiveness.

A moment of silence and in his plodding intonations John Parish "begged the Almighty to look down on this house, upon which for His divine purpose His handmaid had been taken away, that He would walk with the bereaved husband in his incomings and outgoings, and so in His good time bring them all into His eternal peace." It went on and on, gathering up here and there fragments of the Prophets or the pastoral tribes, pagan without the tragedy of paganism, Christian according to Calvin and the Shorter Catechism—a medley of dead words and old repetitions like the flotsam that covers the current of a winding stream. Throughout it all Saunders crouched with open eyes near the wall, hearing



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nothing but the scuffling of his little children in the locked room over his head, wondering helplessly how he would keep things going, staring in a kind of trance at the faded flower upon the wall. . . .

When John Parish rose again to his feet something in the way the little creature straightened the table-cloth, giving it a sudden nervous jerk, the drawn look around his eyes, touched him by its unexpectedness.

"Saunders," he said awkwardly, "before the mourners come in I would like to help you."

But at the word "mourners" the street of heavy rain and the group upon the threshold rose up in all its mockery to a man grown bitter with his own sad handiwork. He would never know how genuine was their kindness stored far beneath the surface like treasured ore. He would never know it was not their fault, nor the fault of John Parish that they were grimmer than death itself, but the curse of something older than they, centuries old, overshadowing the manger of Christ Himself.

"Eh, Maister Parish," he said, "dinna fash yirsel' aboot me for I ken it's lyin' on yir mind to mak' fine an' clear juist hoo puir Jeannie wi' seven bairns should be snappit awa'. . . ."

The minister shook his head. He knew now the man was incorrigible.

"Hush, Saunders—these things are mysteries."

"Richt, Maister Parish, an' so let them bide, for Jeanie was ay a dreich body an' no fair game for a meenister ony mair than if I lay in the kist mysel'," and stopping he was overtaken by a hoasting cough.

It was now nearly the half-hour, and, opening the door, Saunders stood in the shadow until the mourners had passed in, the damp from their clothes rising in a cloud. In the parlour he pressed them to spirits, addressing none by name, but running in and out amongst the tall speechless men as a solicitous boy might wait upon his elders. Out of the corners of their eyes the Northerners watched him searchingly, mistaking his

Lowland perkiness for shallowness of mind, saying little, and that upon subjects altogether removed from their present activities.

The churchyard lay about half a mile from Inverclover on the road towards the Manse. The rain was falling from a mournful sky when they set out and trudged painfully along the empty street. From an upper window Saunders knew the children were looking out from a hole in the blind he had cut for them when they were asleep. He never raised his eyes, however, but if anything stared more fixedly upon the broken road which winds for ever upwards as though the dead were already marching towards the heights.

From far away rising from the clump of summer foliage was the sound of a bell tolling.

III

Back into his house Saunders came, and, closing the door, went into the parlour and slowly pulled up the blind. The grey light flooded the room and rested upon the empty tumblers and the crumbs of cake. Upstairs the children were very quiet as though they were waiting at the locked door for him to come and let them free. Perhaps they were. They must wait for a while. He collected the tumblers upon the tray and carried them into the kitchen. Then, returning, he sat down again and stared with dead eyes at the huddle of ashes in the grate. It was all over. The minister had been and the men he had always feared. They had played their part and he had played his. Death had delivered its sting, the grave had, in ominous words spoken under a weeping heaven, achieved its vaunted victory. What was there left? The interminable years, the struggle of life, the care of motherless children. But there was more than that, and Saunders knew it, and puzzled over it crouching abjectly before the fireplace as a mortally wounded animal huddles in some desolate lair.



Drawn Blinds

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A bottle of whisky lay upon the table, the cork aslant, rammed in by someone as they prepared to leave the house. He had always detested the stuff, had a contempt for that kind of thing. And yet it was a way. . . . Where was the harm? Who would care? That was it—he was near it now—*who would care?* Nobody minded whether he, Archie Saunders, lived or died, was starving or miserable, or heartbroken. In Inverclover they had always hated him. Yet he had never done any there any harm. He had never been even a successful man. The Laird he had attacked, but who had suffered? If anyone surely not James Grahame? Suddenly like a brilliant flash of white light the thing that had lain at the back of his mind ever since his wife's death (and always) was clear as day. In all his life with the exception of Jeannie no one had ever cared. And now Jeannie was dead.

He rose unsteadily to his feet and laid a thin hand, like a claw, upon the bottle. From upstairs came a faint noise as though Agnes, his eldest, had turned the handle of the door. For a moment he was on the point of going up and setting her free. But always the instinct that he must be alone, even for a little while, overcame him, and leaving the parlour he went into the shop. The sight of the drawn blinds recalled to him the people of Inverclover. They would say (so he fretted himself) that he was too broken to notice his darkened house. With a nervous jerk he pulled them up and sitting down upon his stool stared out through the rain-driven window.

He was still crouching there when a man, wrapped in a heavy driving-coat, passed and, coming back, hesitated at the doorway, and finally turned the handle abruptly and entered. It was the Laird.

The face of Saunders grew suddenly more haggard, more desperate. James Grahame, whom he had derided these many years, had come at last. He had hoped to see the Laird in his hour of humiliation. It was fated otherwise.

"A terrible day o' rain, sir," he said grimly.

James Grahame nodded, and taking off his glove fidgeted for a moment with the buttons of his coat. Then without a spoken word he held out his hand.

For an instant Saunders stood like a man turned to stone, then with a queer inarticulate noise he clasped it in both of his, and clung to it, and said nothing. In heavy quickening drops the tears flooded his tired eyes and rolled unchecked down his unshaven cheeks. So they stood for a space, and the obscure shop was as nothing and the weary day of rain forgotten: only two men scarred with the wounds of life remained, as it might have been long since, upon the road to Emmaus.



CHAPTER XV

THE LORD'S DAY

I

EVEN the most tremendous issues in human life do eventually come to pass, and it is only the person of the bleak horizon who repeats that troubles arrive with a brass band but great events to the toot of a penny whistle. The coming of Dr. Dumble had cast its shadow over Inverclover for more than a week when, upon that Sabbath morning, the Miss Macdougalls endeavoured to crush all signs of excitement before Iona for fear the child should think they were put about just because an ex-Moderator was in their midst.

To John Paris, the whole thing was *momentous*. Unfortunately his sister Annie seemed quite unable to understand how important it was that Dr. Dumble should be studied exhaustively. She did not altogether conceal a tendency to belittle Dr. Dumble, not the less irritating because of her evident desire to see as much good in him as she was able. There was, that is to say, a tacit opposition in Annie exceedingly vexing.

The truth of the matter was that, with the coming of Annie Lamont, the spell of fifteen years was in danger of dissolution. It was three weeks since her arrival in Inverclover, and during that time things, little things, had happened. It was not that she interfered, or rather she did interfere, but the galling thing was that she was always right or right enough. John Parish believed life

to be a pleasant, rather somnolent affair. He lived in a semi-conscious state of perambulation, remote from money, questions of food, wages, or supervision. He had every intention of continuing to do so until he died. As a minister of religion he trusted he carried impetus into his labours, but there again he had an abhorrence of the querulous haste and uncertainty of modern life. . . .

During the last two days in particular there had been so many little things, and Annie had a way of tapping at the study door, and coming timidly in, closing it behind her, and telling him something he had suspected for years, but had hoped was not really so. Something to do with the butcher's bill, or Mrs. Grant—things he ought to know, things she had no right to keep from him. But he felt with every fresh incursion that his whole life was crashing about his ears, that his peace of mind was being invaded, insidiously, remorselessly.

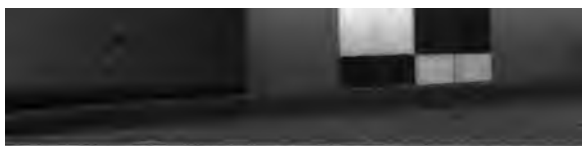
To have any faith in humanity one must be blind to much in life. It disturbed him horribly to have things on his mind, to feel that every time he met his sister something else would be revealed. He had tried to be considerate to her, but if a little sharpness had crept into his voice at times it was only because he was worried and on edge.

Things had come to a crisis the day before. He was in the study when he heard the door softly open and close. His sister Annie was in the room.

"John," she said, "I don't want to disturb you, especially as this is Saturday, but I would not be doing right if I let things slide. It is for you to do what you think best."

She looked terribly white and ill as she stood beside him, very small and neat in her black mourning gown, a white shawl about her shoulders, her hands nervously intertwined.

"Yes—yes—Annie, what is it *now*?"



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Her eyes blinked quickly at the last word.

"I'm sorry, John, only what can I do? This morning when Mrs. Grant was out——"

"Out," echoed her brother.

"A man called with a bill for spirits. She has ordered whisky and not paid."

"Mrs. Grant," he cried, having feared something of the kind for years.

"There are a number of empty bottles in the scullery, John——"

With a sinking heart he realised that the time for action was near at hand.

"This must not go on," he said absently, "must stop at once."

"I think she's back," concluded his sister. "I'm so sorry, John, I'm sure I don't know what I could have done but——"

He looked at her with worried eyes. He was blind to the tragedy of her loneliness in a bleak house, blind to her evident sickness, blind to her pitiful mourning dress.

All his life he had regarded her as a rather dreary creature and beyond comprehension, and with all the good will in the world he did not draw to her at that moment. It was a horrible thing that the minister's housekeeper should drink and not even pay for her in-sobriety, it was beyond question right and proper that such backslidings should be brought to his notice; but he clung more and more to the idea that there is a time for action and a time for inaction, and he hoped Annie would agree with him that discretion should walk hand in hand with justice.

"I never could have believed it," he said, searching for a definite reason why his interview with Mrs. Grant should not take place at once.

His sister was still standing. Without a word she seated herself upon a chair near the window and drawing the cat upon her lap stared mournfully towards him.

A minute passed and he turned his head and looked at her.

"It's very awkward, Annie," he said. "You know what Mrs. Grant is and to-morrow Dr. Dumble comes. Now *Monday* . . ."

"As you think best, John."

"You see, if I spoke to her upon such a serious matter—well——" He smiled ruefully.

His sister said nothing further, made no helpful comment, but passed out of the room and upstairs.

To John Parish the horizon was black with clouds. He had come to look on Mrs. Grant as indispensable. She was a poor cook, extravagant, lazy, and, as he had long refused to believe, addicted to drink. But she had been with him for ten years—she knew his little ways. From morning to night slovenliness and neglect followed hard upon each other's heels. But whenever a trifling uneasiness occurred to him he crushed it with honest manful scorn. Was it a fact the joint rarely returned to table? Then was a single man to gain the reputation of a niggardly housewife? Would it not be better if breakfast were earlier, the front door steps cleaned, the rooms aired, his bed made before the afternoon? Certainly, if a person was so small-minded that his happiness was bounded by these things. But the wise man is one who avoideth friction, and who lets things slide along.

If Mrs. Grant left in a huff—as she might well do—where would he find another suitable woman? Besides, he was used to her. He hated change.

"If I get rid of her," thought John Parish, "it is the beginning of the end. I hope I don't think unkindly of Annie's motives, but she has already spoken of her own housekeeper. It would be a risk, and really I don't know quite what's to be done." With that he rose and went upstairs. At the end of the corridor he paused. The door of his sister's room was open, and he could see her busied with sheets and blankets.



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There again he had hoped Mrs. Grant was attending to Annie. . . .

II

To the outer world, however, these activities behind the curtains were mercifully hid. The Miss Macdougalls breakfasting upon Sunday morning did not require to look upon Dr. Dumble from the human standpoint, and being contrary women made haste to do so.

"We had better be early," said Miss Jean, who had never heard the great man.

"That's a fine church of his in Edinburgh," remarked Miss Christina, who worked downwards in these matters, first admiring the pedestal and then demolishing it brick by brick, "though he seemed thin and theatrical to me. No smeddum."

"Still if he attracts large bodies of people," commented Miss Jean handsomely.

"It's not what I'd call a solid congregation like old Dr. Macgregor Farquharson's," was Miss Christina's emendation; "there's nobody to-day like old Dr. Farquharson." She mused a moment and turned solemnly on Iona. "I've known him preach an hour and a half and no one a button the wiser," she said with quiet triumph.

"But that's forty years ago," sighed Miss Jean; "it was all different then."

"They like thin wash to-day," pursued Miss Christina mournfully, "an' Dr. Dumble just capers with the Scriptures. I've heard he preached once on the Glasgow Exhibition—that's not a subject to elevate the mind. You man's trimmed his sails to the wind ever since he asked Dr. Wheep for his assistantship and him only a second-year student at the time—ye mind that, Jean?"

"I do, Christina—I do and" (turning to Iona), "said Dr. Wheep, 'My mannie, I hev an assistant,' 'Aye,' returned young Dumble, 'but he's contrackit pneumonia and is like to die the day.' An' sure enough he did."

"Mind ye," admitted Miss Christina grudgingly, "there's a kind of common gumption about the man. Iona, dear, just touch the bell for prayers."

That was the summons to the underworld to sit for a few moments upon the dining-room chairs and listen to the Word according to Miss Macdougall. First of all came Sheila, her ruddy sunburnt face composed, her brown eyes focused upon Miss Christina, with a little tag of her abundant golden brown hair fallen upon her smooth white neck. Hard upon her heels was Mrs. MacColl, and last, shutting the door, came Hamish, who, under oppression, had long since surrendered the air of a true believer listening to heresy expounded by the heathen.

Miss Christina, seated at the head of the table, did not raise her eyes but kept them bent upon a very large family Bible, sitting the while upon a smaller book containing prayers equal to every conceivable calamity and crime. Upon the faces of the family of MacColl was no expression whatever, no indication that even in their most secret thoughts had any there entertained for a moment any sympathy or tolerance for the idle pageantry of life. After a pause Miss Christina, satisfied that all was as it should be, read in a powerful denunciatory tone (such as was greatly admired in the sixties) the thirty-sixth chapter of Genesis, which, devoted as it is to the simple and straightforward purpose of genealogy, might, in feebler hands, have avoided a personal or controversial note. Not so with Miss Christina. She had her own ideas about the Hebrew tongue, she sometimes dropped a verse, transferred Bela and Jobab, but not through frailty of sight or weakening faculties, harbouring a very rich contempt for such things. It was because in front of her, as cool as ye please, sat Hamish, no longer a butler but a Papist "ruled and crushed," so she fondly stated, by dear cherubic Father Mackenzie from Mearns. It was because Miss Christina could never resist satisfying herself that the reading of the Word was battering at

the doors of Babylon that names like "Abolibamah" and "Dinhabah" reverberated from her lips like accusations and crashed out of a sea of doom upon the head of Hamish. It was not without intention that Mrs. MacColl and Sheila sat a little apart, thus leaving the unhappy but unbroken man to his own melancholy reflections, and to crave for the moment when Miss Christina reluctantly concluded her chapter, and knelt on the floor for prayer.

There are few who have not their little complacencies, and it was Miss Christina's belief and pride that no one, not even her sister, knew the prayers were not extempore. To preserve this fine and quite erroneous superstition—she practised little artifices that would not have deceived a child. For one thing she made such a business about closing the Bible that she was the last to kneel. Then, as a thief in the night, she produced a little book from under a cushion on her chair, and being as she admitted reluctantly "a shade hard o' hearin'," instantly proclaimed its presence by a crisp rustle of leaves and often enough confirmed everything by a petulant but penetrating whisper "Surely to patience" (a favourite if baffling exclamation in moments of trouble), "surely to patience," and a pause in which Miss Jean (who envied terribly the reading of family prayers, and craved for the day, which never came, when her sister would be overtaken by some slight indisposition) would shake her bowed head with secret gratification and the thought "Poor Christina—she's lost her place again."

Family prayers concluded the Miss Macdougalls decided that they would not go to church before the evening service, when, as everybody was fully aware, the famous Dr. Dumble from Edinburgh would preach, and, as a further inducement to worship, the Dowager Lady Smirr would occupy the Manse pew.

III

In the study John Parish left the Kerrs to entertain the great man while he made the final preparations for their departure to the church. He was sure the Kerrs would enjoy a little quiet time with Dr. Dumble. It was, he thought, quite unnecessary for his sister Annie to remain there.

Mrs. Kerr, the wife of the minister of Pittendreich, was one of those meagre dark women with the hard bright eye of a mouse, and the vitality of an electric battery. Had Mrs. Kerr been born into man's estate, she might have died as rich and famous as she pleased. She possessed all the qualities of success. She was ambitious, secretive, superficial, and with that fine sense of sifting "people who count" from ordinary persons that has ever graced the perfect thruster. She attracted Dr. Dumble just as surely and for the same excellent reason that would have assured her success with Francis Manning.

But being a mere woman all this promise was in danger of falling into dust and ashes. And so after due deliberation Mrs. Kerr took to herself Kerr of Pittendreich, to be the citadel from which she could hurl her darts and behind whose secure walls she could hatch her schemes. Kerr of Pittendreich had two cards that in themselves have won many tricks. He was silent, and he was impressively silent. He never gave himself away; when he expressed an opinion it was reluctantly and with such deliberation that he won a name for soundness, statesmanship, solidarity—all the elements of permanent prestige. Mrs. Kerr saw through him in a moment. She drove him into a corner as a drover rounds up a confused bullock. She assured herself of his magnificent stupidity, and persisted in marrying him. There is every reason to believe he will become a very distinguished man, a Moderator, a Royal

Chaplain, Dean of the Thistle, and be even as Dr. Dumble.

"My dear Mrs. Kerr," said the ex-Moderator, standing with his back to the study fireplace, and taking no notice whatever of Mrs. Lamont, "my dear Mrs. Kerr, you make too much of my poor little literary efforts. And now tell me, how is everything at Pittendreich?"

Mrs. Kerr shot him a swift intimate glance, such as one Cabinet minister might share with another.

"Pittendreich is Pittendreich," she said, at which they both laughed, Dr. Dumble shaking his head reprovingly.

"I have always been thankful," he remarked, turning towards Mrs. Lamont, "that I spent two years in a country charge. It gave me time for study—thought and study—that I have never regretted. I often look back on those days with envy.

"My husband . . ." began Mrs. Lamont timidly.

"And were I a young man to-day I would be strongly inclined to remain out of a large charge until I was thirty-five—at least."

"My husband . . ." persisted Mrs. Lamont.

"I recall Lord Macintosh saying long ago that a man only came to his full maturity at sixty. As I get on in years I am more and more impressed by that statement."

"I think . . ." began Mrs. Kerr.

"I entirely agree with you," reverberated Dr. Dumble, "and as I say——" He permitted himself some illuminating and personal data.

IV

Down the road from Upper Clover, up the road from Inverclover, from Garroch and the Calder Glen people came bustling towards the parish church. They came in gigs and carriages, on cycles and on foot, while mo-

tors conveying English chieftains from Highland fastnesses hooted and snorted past the kirkyard, aglow with the knowledge that for once dinner was not eight but eight-thirty, and that the Dowager Lady Smirr had given the lead. The ghosts of covenanters, had they watched such a gathering, would have asked one of another in awestruck tones what manifestation of God had reaped so fine a harvest and a voice would have gone up in honest indignation "Haud yir blethers, this is no' a manifestation—it's naething mair nor less than Archie Dumble frae Edinburgh."

Never had the church presented so goodly a spectacle. There were people there who for years had been prevented from worship by chronic indisposition, prostration after the labours of the week, medical advice, and religious grounds. There were visitors from the Free Church who entered the building with the confident carriage and quiet assurance of men not dependent on the State. There was a little band from the Episcopalians across the road, very anxious to show everyone they were not accustomed to such a place, bringing ostensibly the wrong books in their hands, and making a great business of finding the psalms.

At the church door, upon this monumental occasion, Miss Christina turned and flashed an eye over her retainers, particularly Sheila and her young man Dan Cameron, who, as the son of the old gardener of Invershaws, was therefore beholden to the houses both of Macdougall and Grahame, and not likely to overlook the fact. Miss Christina might just as well have shouted all that was contained in her threatening glance, which said quite clearly: "You may imagine upon entering these portals that you're free to behave as you please. In that you are gravely in error. I shall sit in front but I shall hear a creak, or a shuffle, or a snore just as surely as though I were beside you, and shall not allow the House of God to become a nest of nodding, whispering, ogling woodcocks."

Upon David, who had fallen in with the expedition outside Garroch, she delivered a single look. Then recalling that he was from the south, she turned about and a moment later they entered a church already full and burdened with that air of expectancy so bracing to a preacher of the Word.

Now the Macdougall seats were in two pews, one behind the other—the first for the family, the second for the retainers. To the horror and scandal of Miss Christina, two women, two English visitors, were seated “as proud as ye please” in the first pew, leaving not more than two vacancies, if that. It is at such moments that established reputations crash to earth like rotten trees. Miss Christina would gladly and readily enough have turned those hapless creatures into the aisle. She was one of those who make temporal things as permanent as determination and mortality will permit. She cherished a family cradle, she treasured a family tradition, she worshipped in a family pew or nowhere, and she had every intention of entering a family vault.

Whatever qualities Miss Christina possessed they were not those of the meek in heart. Her Christianity would have chilled an evangelist and left Dr. Dumble with a rueful countenance. For in it was no resting upon the complacency of the unknown, no confidence that slovenliness of thought or conduct would be smoothed over either in this life or the next, and a sterling contempt for equality, fraternity and liberty, as the claptrap of political demagogues.

It was therefore with a fine wrath that Miss Christina considered the English visitors. She was not blind to facts—not she. Why had they come at all? Pure vacant curiosity. Why had they taken the front seat? Because they were in the habit of waiting at the head of a queue for theatres, funerals of eminent persons, marriages and all public side-shows. Why did they not realise the enormity of their offence? Because of their

national vulgarity. In their lives were no sacred places, no penates, no traditions—nothing but Tottenham Court Road furniture, prints of Queen Victoria, and a sentimental affection for the hymn “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.”

But David blessed those two foolish creatures, for now he must needs sit next Iona in the second seat.

Only one remark Miss Christina permitted herself, delivering it in broad Scots and with an eye like a naked claymore.

“The seat cushion,” she said in a rasping whisper, “is owre short at ane end, but by pu’ing it weel to yir side ye wull’ na hev tae sit askew.”

The English ladies having followed out these instructions in all good faith and nodded their thanks—the neighbouring pews were reduced to such a hush of exaltation that Dr. Dumble, entering at that moment to take his seat below the pulpit, could not but find in it a tribute to his own great reputation, and permitted himself a glance at the Dowager Lady Smirr, an ancient dame under an enormous hat of ostrich plumes.

The Miss Macdougalls, meanwhile, made a great business of wishing to make the best of everything, and not put anyone out, but being for some reason or another unable to sit down altogether or remain sitting down, rose in turn and nodding to each other whispered and rustled their silk gowns, and assured each other and Iona in the next pew that it would be quite all right, but of course they had never tried so many in the pew before; they further agreed that a buffet was undoubtedly a comfort, but that when people knelt as they had heard the English did, a buffet was the only means by which they could hope to be seen at all, and not much of them even then. Several times had Mr. Kerr, one of those long cadaverous Celtic twilight ministers with a dark drooping moustache, contemplated rising and extending his large dejected

hands in prayer. But upon each occasion one or other of the Miss Macdougalls threatened a disruption, or discovered that her smelling salts (which neither lady had ever used) were at the back of the seat, or simply turned sharply to stare with fresh interest at the English visitors. At last, seizing a moment of comparative calm, Mr. Kerr rose and elevating his eyebrows opened in pensive and Dumble accents that remarkable service. The Dowager Lady Smirr (seated next to Mrs. Lamont and John Parish) lowered her ostrich plumes a full half inch, Dr. Dumble bent forward and said "Amen" encouragingly at the end, while the Miss Macdougalls closed their eyes, but opening them cautiously noted, with mutual despair, the wreckage of the English ladies now floundering upon the buffets, and dragging the pew cushion after them towards the floor.

In due course Mr. Kerr disappeared when Dr. Dumble, gathering up his fine silk gown for fear he should trip and come to grief, slowly mounted the pulpit stairs. This he did with such dignity, such poise, such restraint that many a man would have rested content with so perfect an achievement and simply preached a sound if old-fashioned sermon by Dr. Chalmers. Not so Dr. Dumble. Having gained the pulpit, which he entered with lowered head, he raised his eyes, let them rest for an instant upon Miss Christina, turned, and with a single superb gesture clicked the sneck of the door. It said throughout that place of worship "Here I am—the great Dr. Dumble—not an ex-Moderator for the next forty minutes but just a man like yourselves, or as near as circumstances will allow."

Advancing to the closed Bible with its mighty golden clasp, Dr. Dumble extended his hands, closed his eyes, and in a voice so low that persons bent forward to catch its merest murmur and so melodious that David forgot to listen at all, breathed forth a few words and addressed himself to his sermon. That

plaintive confidential note so emphatically Dumble has swept the pulpits of Scotland like a sultry breeze. Fine muscular assistants have gone down before it in their hundreds, for its manner is sweetly argumentative and pleading in turns, and it is as full of pinfall pauses as a cake of plums. That is all the work of Dumble, who was the first man since the Reformation to give up rating and ranting like a fish-wife at the Almighty.

In prayer Dr. Dumble set half the pulpits in Scotland explaining the Deity to Himself—in the delivery of a sermon he simply revolutionised the whole tradition of Edinburgh preaching. In the pulpit of Inverclover he announced: "The text you will find in the Book of Job—in Job, chapter thirty-one, verse forty. 'Let thistles grow instead of wheat and cockle instead of barley.'"

That was a typical Dumble text, and its psychological effect on Inverclover was remarkable. To begin with, no one knew such a text existed; even Miss Christina felt that Dr. Dumble must be more scholarly than she had judged him. They were accustomed to John Parish reading (rather badly) a passage from Samuel and forging ahead on temple customs, a line of exposition which did not appeal to Dr. Dumble who dredged the Scriptures, and in particular Proverbs, Job and Revelation for the recondite, the bizarre, or the merely beautiful passage that might appear at first sight to offer neither meat nor drink. Many would be utterly at sea to preach for forty minutes on the words "Cockle instead of barley." Some might not even know what cockle was.

Thoughts like these tantalised the congregation of Inverclover. They clung to Dr. Dumble's fine silk gown hoping to the last that he would fall by the wayside. But he held steadily along, not plunging out to sea, but splashing majestically in the shallows, embel-

lishing some tender point by an anecdote, or a verse from Tennyson, or a personal reminiscence. And at the termination of every superbly delivered platitude Dr. Dumble would lean forward, a light perspiration gleaming upon his smooth white brow, and repeat with breathless emphasis, "Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley." . . .

David awoke long after to hear Dr. Dumble announcing Hymn 207, "Every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at even."

The organ throbbed, the choir rose, a congregation that would rest from their labours for many Sabbaths rustled leaves, and clipped sixpences sharply on book boards. The English visitors looked about them with mild benignant gaze, and resented the stern inaccessibility of Miss Christina as a discordant note in their present harmony of mild religious exaltation. In that grey church, dimly lighted, standing like a sanctuary of old dreams in a lonely place, David was touched by the emotion of association and memory. The words "The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended," recalled Harrow and College Chapel. Long ago he had sung them with kindred voices, thoughtlessly, in a clear sweet treble. And now, less thoughtlessly, but strangely moved, he opened his book, standing with his face upraised, waiting for the choir to commence. Iona had not moved since she rose with the rest. She did not attempt to find the place or even lift her book. From the side aisle he might have seen John Parish watching her with an unmistakable expression in his eyes. . . .

David bent and touched her arm. She did not start but gave him a small curious look like a child that has been day-dreaming. Then taking the other side of the book she lowered her eyes. David sang unconscious that his voice rose and soared beyond the black rows

of worshippers, and out through the open windows across the timeless moor.

"So be it, Lord, Thy throne shall never
Like earth's proud empires pass away—"

The words meant nothing to him, but the spirit of youth, pure, untarnished by doubt, caught them up and claimed them, giving them henceforth the imperishable gold of truth.

To John Parish leaning forward and seeing only Iona standing side by side with David, sharing his book, they meant nothing either. Words that were soon enough to ring like unearthly bells in his ears, had long since grown meaningless with custom. To him "the Church unsleeping" was triumphantly evidenced in the superb and unquestionable presence of Dr. Dumble and that goodly assemblage.

v

While Dr. Dumble was reproving Mrs. Kerr for stating that the sermon was a trifling twenty minutes, whereas it had covered double that time, while the great man, that is to say, was expanding and luminating and becoming splendidly anecdotal, far up the glen the Colonel was inviting David to draw in his chair, and set to.

"And how did ye find Dumble?" he asked with meaning.

"The church was packed."

"He'll be ane o' the paunchy red-jowled breed, I take it."

"Everybody seemed to enjoy the sermon," replied David evasively, "except Miss Macdougall."

The Colonel uttered a low gratified chuckle.

"There's a woman," he said proudly; "it would be a poor lookout for the Dumbles were there Christinas to spare. And John Parish would be in church, eh?"

"He was sitting in the Manse pew with Lady Smirr."

"That auld runt. I mind the time her mother's father touched his bonnet to Colonel John Macdougall an' thankful. John Parish is a problem. Manning, what's yir opinion o' the minister?"

"I like him," said David simply.

The Colonel snatched up a chunk of bread, broke it in his long nervous fingers, and plunged for the butter with his knife.

"My faither," he remarked, "used to classify ministers under types. He was great'ane for types, my faither. There were, he said (an' mony's the time I've heard the words), just three sorts o' ministers. There were the dreich lean anes, who are sae taken up wi' the next world, they're far better oot o' this; the fat anes, like Dumble, who contrive to cock an eye at baith; an' the middlin' anes, like John Parish here, who are not greatly taken up with either. But I canna say he accounted for auld Doctor Thrawn o' Duchry. I never heard a man sae fu' o' the next world. He brocht Hell very close. . . . But nowadays that's a' gone. And speakin' for mysel', Manning, I'm too old for Church attendance. I canna mend the past an' I don't greatly heed the future. Ye come to a time of life when baith this world and the next get awfu' tiresome, an' the thocht o' living for ever sort o' ruthless. But there, what must be must be, though it'll gae my mither a sair moment to find her Andie just a shauckling auld man. Rax me the cheese, Manning. Help yirsel'—it's no an ordinary cheese that, though not what it was."

The Colonel ate for some time in silence. Then carrying the decanter over to the table by the fire, he collected some broken scraps upon a plate, whistled for the dogs and opening the door left them to their supper.

"They'll bark when they're finished," he said, and sitting down lit the inevitable cheroot.

To David the moment had come. Ever since he had opened his father's letter the idea of consulting the Colonel had taken root. He, like the Laird, regarded the old soldier as a mine of worldly experience and wisdom.

"You remember we discussed the purchase of Garroch."

"I do, boy."

"Well, things have got to be settled. My father is on his way home, may arrive here any time. Something must be done first. Otherwise you know what they'd think of me—they'd believe I had come to spy out the land."

The Colonel chewed his cheroot.

"Well," he said guardedly.

"I ought to explain, and then either clear out or have a talk with Mr. Grahame."

"Who would ye explain to," asked the Colonel shrewdly. "No the Laird, then?"

David reddened. He had shown his hand.

"You see," he replied, "it's Miss Grahame who has been so—in fact whom I know best."

"And how d'ye think she'll take it?"

"I hope I'll satisfy her that I never realised how matters stood about Garroch, indeed that until you came to the inn I did not know the place was for sale at all."

The Colonel made no reply.

"You see, I don't want them to think me underhand."

"They won't—never fear—they won't," reassured the Colonel, fighting down a smile.

"And there's another thing."

"Eh me—what can that be, boy?"

"I hardly like to say. It's rather private. You wouldn't breathe a word, Colonel?"

"Me—sure as death."

"It all happened so suddenly. I hardly knew—I never

suspected until—until that day she—I mean I came to tea here."

"Not the day Iona came," inquired the Colonel with an air of fine simplicity.

"It's about her," he said miserably. "It is Iona."

The Colonel made an extravagant start, threw down his cheroot, opened his mouth wide, and then clapped David on the arm.

"Iona," he cried, "you and Iona. Think o' that, now. From yir lang face I'd hev sworn ye were in for typhus. Davie—I canna thole Manning ony longer—Davie, pick up, boy—it's no as bad as that. I'm no a married man mysel', but Iona——"

"You don't understand, Colonel. Even were I in a position to ask her I don't suppose for a moment she'd look at me—why should she?"

"Lord," muttered the Colonel and drank noisily.

"I've nothing—no prospects beyond my father. Don't you see if he buys Garroch it'll break her heart."

"Hoots," said the Colonel, "I'll persuade yir faither. He must see reason. I'll settle him, Davie."

"But the Laird?"

"Leave him tae me," returned the Colonel, replenishing his glass and paying no heed to the clamorous expostulations of his retainers on the step.

"Miss Christina. She will be furious."

For a moment the Colonel flinched perceptibly. But the occasion was historic, and David's anxious gaze upon him. He felt he underrated his diplomatic powers.

A woman—faugh!

"Leave her to me," he said less boldly, and cast a defiant glance about the room, staring for some time at the portrait of his grandfather whose determined smile was, at such a moment, merely an irritation.

But whatever the Colonel's ancestor might think, David considered the exterior vicissitudes surrounding

his romance swept away. He need trouble no more about them.

"That takes a weight off my mind," he said gratefully. "Now," and he stopped.

"I canna propose for ye," remarked the Colonel humorously, "but it'll be all right, Davie—mark my words."

"I don't know that I ought to."

"Nonsense—tak' a grip o' yirsel', and it'll be all over before ever ye ken what's happened."



CHAPTER XVI

LOVE IN A GARDEN

I

JOHAN PARISH walked restlessly up and down his study. It was Tuesday afternoon, and with the departure of Dr. Dumble loomed up the problem of Mrs. Grant. The more he turned the matter over in his mind the less eager he felt for an interview that must, under the circumstances, strike a painful and personal note. While readily allowing Mrs. Grant was not perfect there was beyond question the fact that apart from his sister Annie he would never have dreamed of making a change. He had the greatest aversion, almost terror, for change, and he was not the first to stone the noble army of reformers. It was impossible also to dissociate from his mind the prejudice against Annie planted there many years ago by his father. He wondered what that eccentric person would have said about the present arrangement.

The late Dr. Charles Parish had been a man of so many attainments that his progress through life was like one of those gifted persons who play for a humble donation, upon a dozen instruments at once. There were his inventions, large and small, which so nearly made a fortune, but for some perfectly trifling reason or another just failed to receive financial support. He had quite a turn for landscape work, and John had frequently heard kindly experts express their disappointment that his father would not either finish an individual picture or take up art as a profession. His

little book, "National Efficiency and International Trade," created some comment and sold a modest hundred copies. Crushed by these activities between which an occasional patient must be seen and harried into the street, this unhappy man, tottering under a dozen talents, and disdaining to wrap any in a napkin, rushed from morning to night. His death was as hurried and staccato as the conversation of a person when the guard's whistle is ringing down the platform. He expressed no interest, apprehension, or any other emotion regarding a future existence, thus remaining at least consistent, and, having implored John to digest the rules of success laid down in his "National Efficiency," was swept away into the unknown beyond the clamour of his creditors. The driving impulse of Dr. Parish's life had been a terror of stagnation, the kind of mental acquiescence of his domestic hearth, and so saturated had the early years of John's life become with the picture of his father fleeing the company of his wife and daughter, that the legend of danger remained, against time and common-sense, like a forsaken gibbet still upright in a forgotten place.

He would not have admitted such a monstrous absurdity, but it was implanted too deeply to be cast out casually. The hand of the past upon him, as upon a thousand others, controlled, though he would have scoffed at the idea, his attitude towards Annie, his incapacity to see in anything she did or said, qualities that, in a stranger, would have called out his chivalry and gratitude.

He was standing by the window staring moodily upon the grass when she came into the room. He did not turn, but remained with his back to her, his hands in his pockets.

"John."

"Well."

"You said you wished to speak to me."

She was sitting on the extreme edge of a deal chair, Snow upon her knees.

The sight of the cat irritated him to sudden rudeness.

"Surely that beast can use the floor, Annie," he said, swinging about.

"I'll take her upstairs, John. I won't be a moment."

She went softly away, and through the open door he saw the disreputable figure of Mrs. Grant passing to wash the front door steps. Diffidently he had once suggested the morning for such activities, but she had her own way, she said, and must keep to it. . . .

Mrs. Lamont returned and closed the door, sitting upon the hard chair. She was whiter in the last month, with a dead greyness of the skin and beneath her eyes, always so fluttering and timid, lurked ominous shadows.

"It's about Mrs. Grant," said her brother abruptly. "I have thought about her going and I don't know."

"Then keep her, John—only it might be wise to speak to her."

"About the whisky? I know. But you see, Annie, if I dismiss her on such a charge how can I give her a reference? After so many years' service it would seem rather cruel, wouldn't it?"

"But do you think her a good servant, John?"

"I've never worried about it, Annie. You see, a man prefers to let live more than a woman. But I suppose there are better."

His sister nervously coiled and uncoiled her hands.

"It's for you, John, not for me that I'm thinking. I only thought you might be more comfortable. You see, you never think of yourself—anything does, and the body gets so easily run down. It makes a difference to have good meals in time."

"I hate giving notice," he said obstinately, "but if you spoke to her, Annie—and did not mention the whisky—couldn't we see whether she realised that we

knew something?" His face brightened as at a triumph in casuistry. "Did you hear me?"

Mrs. Lamont started and looked up.

"Yes," she said faintly.

"You aren't ill, Annie?"

"Oh no, John, of course not. Yes, I will speak to her. Shall I go now?"

He hesitated, fretted by the whole thing, and turning away stood at the mantelpiece leaning upon one hand.

A little movement in the room, and he tried to collect his thoughts.

"What did you say, Annie?"

"Never mind," she replied. "You are tired, John. I will go."

But there came at that moment a knock at the door, the handle rattled, and Mrs. Grant entered.

"Might I speak to you, sir?" she said in her historic voice.

"Yes—Mrs. Grant—yes."

"I am sorry to say, sir, I've decided to give you notice. I don't think I'm very happy here *now*."

The emphasis on the last word was unmistakable. It said perfectly clearly that change and conspiracy were afoot.

"This is very unexpected, Mrs. Grant."

"Perhaps, sir, and perhaps not. I insinuate nothing—I complain of nothing. It is sudden, sir, after ten years' service, but not too soon. Things might otherwise have been spoken, sir, that would have been regretted, and *rankled*. I bear no malice. I simply prefer to leave to-day."

"To-day—but really that will put us out terribly. A little consideration, Mrs. Grant, surely—a month's notice."

"I have private means, sir, and I make no claim."

In the painful silence that followed this startling disclosure, Mrs. Grant shuffled slowly from the room, and for the last time they listened to the clip-clop of

her neighbourless shoe crossing the hall. When it died completely away John Parish awoke, as it were, from a trance and said with no disguise of disaster——

"This is the end—the end of everything."

He uttered those melancholy words in great sincerity, and although he did not specify anything, he knew, beyond doubt, that Mrs. Grant would not have acted so outrageously before Annie came.

They were still sitting there when she reappeared, once again in her tweed skirt, her gaiters and her splendid hat. She remarked that she would send up for her box, that she would often think of Mr. Parish and her life in Inverclover, and that she bore him nothing but goodwill. She made no reference whatever to her future, or her destination, and, walking tediously down the avenue, passed through the gate, and without a backward glance, went down the road to the station.

"John," said Mrs. Lamont.

"Yes," he replied sharply.

"Don't worry about the house."

"What's the use of talking like that—we can't manage without a servant."

"Will you leave it to me, John—please."

Dimly he knew what was in her mind. For a moment he hesitated.

"All right," he answered her, and after a pause, "but don't do anything foolish, Annie."

She smiled fondly at him, and to make sure of her little triumph left the room.

A few minutes passed and suddenly she heard him calling from the hall, saying he was going to look in at Garroch, and might not be home till supper.

II

David came slowly down the Upper Calder road, hesitated at the garden entrance to Garroch, then quickly lifted the latch and passed within. It was

three o'clock and not a soul was astir. He was too early.

Along the banks of the Clover water upon the Garroch side grows a straggling wood scarce two hundred yards in breadth with a path winding within sight of the running stream. It was in the heart of this place, lying in a hammock stretched between two pines, that he came upon Iona. He did not pause, but came noiselessly on, until he stood beside her, looking down upon her pale sorrowful face, the shadows about her eyes, the way her breast rose and fell.

And as he was drawing back Iona sighed and opened her eyes, and a faint colour rose swiftly to her cheeks. But she gave no start, nor spoke. It was as though she had dreamed he had come to wake her, and so it was.

"Iona," said David, "Iona," and made a little tremulous movement of his hands. He had come prepared to say so much.

But at the sound of her name a change, miraculous, transfiguring, passed into her face, and cried out its infinite gladness in her eyes.

"David," she answered as though even yet she were not fully awake. "David," and then a little louder, as though she loved the name so greatly, "I knew you would come, David, like this."

At these words his arms stretched out and passed round her.

"Iona," he said in a low trembling voice, "I wanted to tell you I love you—how very much I love you. Do you understand, my darling—tell me, do you love me?"

She looked up into his eyes saying nothing.

"Tell me, Iona—can it really be that you love me?"

"Oh, David," she whispered, "I think I have always loved you."

He did not understand, but afar off, as in confirmation, he heard the sighing amongst the trees, the eternal singing of water.

Then, bending his head, he kissed her, and she clung to him and ran her fingers through his yellow hair, and let him lift her out of the hammock as it might have been a little child, and set her on the grass by the Clover water.

"There is so much I should explain," he said at last.

She shook her head.

"Please," she whispered, "what can there be except just this?"

"Outside this wood, Iona, lies the world."

"It cannot enter here—it has never come here. Even there I will love you."

"Like this."

"Just like this. You see, I have never had anyone to care for before."

He brooded over her words.

"Tell me," he said with a smile, "how does the future look?"

She turned her head, and raised her glowing, wondering eyes.

"What future?" she asked.

"You don't understand these things, sweetheart; how can you? But there's your father, Miss Macdougall, my father—it frightens me even now."

She nodded her head slowly.

"Don't let it frighten you, Davie," she said in the same quiet tone, with her strange air of certainty. "Don't think of it, Davie—is it not enough you love me? You will always love me, won't you? The present is ours, Davie—leave the future awhile."

"But we will talk of it, Iona."

"Later, Davie—to-morrow—not now."

"Yes," he agreed, greatly relieved to be rid of it. "Let us forget everything, Iona."

"Just you and me, Davie."

"Just you and me."

III

It was five o'clock when John Parish reached Garroch, and took tea with the Miss Macdougalls and Iona. When the old ladies had excused themselves upon their several duties he went with her into the garden. He noticed neither the colour in her cheeks nor light in her eyes—he was obsessed by the bundle of his estimates, and the future that lay within it and beyond.

"Mr. John," she said softly.

"Yes, Iona."

"I want you to come with me—into the wood. I have something to say—something to tell you."

"Something to tell me," he repeated with a swift change in his expression.

She made no reply but went quickly ahead, down the soundless pathway between the trees.

At the place where David had caught her in his arms she paused, and flushed, and gave him a timid eager look as though the thing needed no spoken utterance of hers, but was written for ever in the song of the Clover water.

"You must think of me as grown up now, Mr. John. No more the Iona of yesterday and all the yesterdays."

The colour rushed to his cheeks.

"Iona—you are speaking of the time you said you would never be a woman?"

"Yes, and I said, I promised you should know. Can't you see, Mr. John? Am I not changed?"

He started, giving her a quick dazed look full of hope and wonder. It radiated his whole countenance, and shone in his longing eyes.

"I want to tell you something," she said again.

"Yes—yes."

"It is not easy to speak of it. You have always looked on me as a child, and so I was—till to-day—till

only an hour ago. I tell you I have bade farewell to myself of yesterday, Mr. John."

"I don't understand, Iona. Perhaps I am dull. I know I'm dull. Come down to my level—don't you see I'm waiting. Don't play with me."

She gave him a sudden dubious glance.

"Play with you," she echoed.

"You know how I love you, Iona."

"I know, Mr. John—I know. What would I have done without you all these years?"

"No—no—not like that."

And suddenly, remorselessly, the truth began to fall like drops of ice into his brain. He began to understand. He heard her speaking, felt her eyes searching his face, thought she hesitated, but made no sign. He might, at that supreme moment, have been stricken deaf and dumb, or as a man grown suddenly immensely old.

"I wanted you to know—as a secret. You do not guess? Then let me tell you. To-day David came, came to me here where we are standing just as I knew he would come some day. That is all, Mr. John."

His lips trembled but no words passed, and then, reaching out blindly with one hand, he found hers and pressed it repeatedly, and said nothing.

"To-day for us the world stands still."

The words haunted his mind, echoed and re-echoed like a refrain repeated over and over again. For them, David and Iona, the world stood still. . . .

The sunlight, centuries old, travelling through the vast deserts of time rested in a kind of reverie upon the two figures near the flowing river, rested also for a moment upon the aged walls of Garroch and the Laird sitting in solitude within, upon the Manse and Mrs. Lamont thinking her pensive thoughts, upon a world that even in Inverclover never "stood still," but was even now gathering its sheaves before the darkness.

Suddenly John Parish knew that his hour, long heralded, greatly misjudged, had already struck. He must say something—something altogether different from any of the things abiding like spectres in his mind, something so remote from his own life and fallen hopes that it might be as another man speaking, or a clown, with death in his home, cracking the ring-master's whip. He must so rise to the occasion that so far as he was concerned, the world must yet stand still awhile, watching on a summer day a vision of children wandering in a wood.

Touched profoundly he forgot for a moment his own stark sorrow which seemed so empty of poetry now. "Iona," he cried, "God give you happiness."

"You are glad, Mr. John—it was a surprise, wasn't it?"

"A great surprise."

"You will be fond of Davie."

"I am fond of him already."

"And you will be his friend as well as mine."

"I will."

She looked in her silent way upon the running water.

"I am so happy," she said suddenly.

He smiled bravely back.

And so they returned to Garroch.

At the gate beside the river a packet slipped from his pocket and rolled to the ground.

"Papers," she said. "You busy Mr. John."

His hand trembled as he fumbled for them, and a sudden mist rose before his eyes.

"Just papers," he replied, and clutched the handle of the gate.

"It won't make any difference to us, will it?" she asked anxiously.

"No—no—how could it?"

"I mean you will still be Mr. John—or will things be different?"

"It is because things will be different, Iona, that I

want you to call me Mr. John—always Mr. John—the name of your childhood. For whenever you call me Mr. John I shall not think of you as grown up but—there, there, Iona, you understand. Look, is not that David coming? Good-bye, good-bye.”

He broke off and hurrying over the bridge went quickly down the path. Once only he turned, waved a moment, and, turning again, was soon lost to sight.

IV

Inside the Manse there was a deep stillness. He was exhausted and moving in mist, but he wondered at the absolute quiet and remembered Mrs. Grant had gone. He reflected in the minute disinterested fashion peculiar to anyone emerging from some emotional crisis that he would have to obtain another housekeeper. He repeated to himself that he would have to obtain another housekeeper, and entering the study sat wearily down. The room was just as he had left it only an hour or so ago. The window was still open, the creeper was still rustling in the pleasant summer breeze. Upon his desk still lay the same sermon with the subject written on the outside page in faded yellow lettering—a sermon he had preached in 1905 and was touching up as a slack mechanic patches a faulty machine.

All over the house had fallen a deepening lethargy. Mrs. Grant had never been the soul of industry, but she had made a noise. Now there was no sound at all. In his life, too, more than ever before, but how differently, the world was standing still. Downstairs he knew his sister Annie was moving about, arranging things, putting pans in the oven, busy with monotonous labour. He wondered whether he should go down and help her, or whether he should go to the village about a daily woman to cook and wash up. But the matter passed at once from his mind—the abounding

and not discomfoting stillness fell again as mist, torn asunder by a fugitive wind, sinks back upon a ragged cleft of rock; and he saw himself, as it were, a stranger, faced by who could say how many years of awful repetition and deepening weariness. What lay in the future was no longer the unknown—it carried no secret—there was nothing now but routine grown attenuated by the slow pressure of indolence. The sense of self-preservation warned him that he stood at the cross roads and must bestir himself before the night came. But what lay to his hand? Did he visit more would they thank him? Would Archie Saunders run out of his shop to beckon him in? Did he spend a week on his sermons would they ever know or care? He had none of his father's energy for practising a thousand unrewarded trades. And yet in that dreary hour, in the Manse where the Rev. Julius Johnson had withstood similar reflections for so long and no longer, there rose up as it were the ghost of himself, and behind it the shadow of many years, in which nothing was accomplished, nothing valiantly achieved, or valiantly lost—only the middle way that carries neither glory nor honour. He recognised the truth—he did not reassure himself, excuse himself. He only knew, without gladness, but with a heavy sorrow, that through some cause or other the way of salvation was to him lost, it might be for ever, like a track in the woods hidden by leaves. . . .

Annie cooked the dinner, and when it was finished gathered the dishes upon a tray. He had hardly spoken at all, but suddenly he rose and laid his hands on the cloth.

"I will help you," he said.

"No—please, John. You look so tired."

"I am tired," he admitted, his fingers sliding from the cloth.

Mrs. Lamont nodded and smiled affectionately.

"This is a treat for me," she said.

"A treat?"

"To see you looked after."

"But really it's not good for me. I'm not a delicate man, nor an overworked man, nor the kind of man who should be made more comfortable than is wise."

"Nonsense, John. Now please leave me to see to this."

"We must find a housekeeper, Annie."

"Was my cooking not to your liking?"

"It was excellent, but the work is too much for you."

"Not a bit—not a bit—and I'd like to do something, John. I'm miserable unless I'm occupied. A house is a godsend to us women, you know."

He shook his head, but the terrible inertia that had fallen upon him deprived him of the power of further argument.

"Please go to bed, John—I have put a hot bag in, and the sheet is turned down."

"Thank you, Annie—thank you."

"And to-morrow——"

"Yes?"

"You must take your breakfast in your room."

"Oh no—I couldn't dream of it."

She was pathetically tyrannical.

"I won't take a refusal, John. I will bring you up the paper and your letters."

For a moment he hesitated, and was suddenly conscious that it signified nothing either to him or anyone else whether he lay abed or not.

"All right," he said, and, going to the study, closed the door. The bundle of estimates lay upon the table just where he had thrown them when he returned from Garroch. Sitting down he wrote Macdonald that he had decided to let the matter drop. He read the letter through, blotted it slowly, and placed it in an envelope for James to deliver in the morning.



CHAPTER XVII

THE WORLD STANDS STILL

I

JOSEPH the Garroch pony, reviewing the splendour of the July morning with a jaundiced eye, saw a sun climbing into a smiling heaven and knew that it was bad. Across the face of the loch a pearl grey haze was lifting and all around him arose the early clamour of a host of birds.

"It is," he reflected, "one of *those* kind of days, is it?" and jerking back his ears showed a patch of yellow eye-ball. To him there were days and days, and this was of the obvious kind that are out for trouble. To Joseph a good honourable day opened with a thin drizzle at dawn, progressed into a nice enveloping mist at noon, and threatened anything from a snowstorm to thunder at twilight. The kind of day that inspired simple persons passing the paddock to remark, "Poor old pony, then, out in the rain." There was also the day that was neither good nor bad but like a morality play, wrestled between the two—there was the day that started with a high glass and drenched you splendidly at Appendreech over the hill. To Joseph a cloud on the far horizon was portentous, a spot of rain an omen, a far-off growl of thunder as the voice of the Almighty speaking wisely.

Upon this July morning there was a young man about Garroch, a reckless sun in an empty sky, and afar off the unobtrusive figure of Duncan Haggis in converse with Miss Christina, for whom Joseph nur-

tured a deep and active abhorrence. To hear that woman say quite off-hand, "Duncan, there's a box of stores at Dunmore," was in itself a blow at the very soul of democracy. Miss Jean let him choose his pace, but Miss Christina whipped up hill and down hill and had once, when he had made a distinct stand for independence, unloosened a large gold safety pin she wore, and outraged the code of honourable warfare. It was always possible for a pony of mettle to jib for a week or so, but he had every reason to believe that Miss Christina would light a fire to warm his underneath, and, although obstinate to the death, Joseph was not of the noble army of martyrs.

Shortly after Miss Christina's return to the house, Duncan Haggis came into the paddock and Joseph was led away to the stable. It was as he had suspected "one of those picnics." Harnessed and thrust between the shafts he was rattled round to the front of Garroch and pulled up. From the hall he heard Hamish approaching, and, by screwing his neck, observed a large basket covered with a white cloth, two or three light brown stone bottles, and a kettle. It only remained to count, in a venomous silence, the crowds of people who would come chattering out and jump excitedly into the governess cart. Sometimes there was the greatest merriment whether it would hold five or six—a kind of humour Joseph never cared about.

There were upon the steps the two old ladies, the Laird he knew had been away a day or two. On the other hand, young people, if left to themselves, sometimes trotted over half Perthshire. Altogether it was quite impossible on days like these to know where one was. . . .

A moment of silence upon the steps, and then Iona, with David carrying her cloak, climbed in, there was the bang of the door, a little shouting of farewells, and they were off.

II

Far up beyond the lower slopes of Clover, lying towards the south, is the Glen of Maidens, called so for its secrecy and purity, and because, in olden times, girls came there "wishing" under a new moon. It is hard to come by, a mere cleft in the flank of Calder, and unapproachable from the south. A tiny spring bubbles up at the head of it, and goes laughing over smooth slabs of granite or falling with its fragile thread of music into grass-rimmed basins of water. A few trees stand at the southern end—they can be seen a mile beneath, their crests against the clear sky, standing immutably like outposts guarding the pass. There is a glade of grass running down the centre of the glen like a carpet set for some pageantry. Beside it the burn is winking in the sun or crooning by night its traveller's rune. On the high enveloping hills the heather is crimson, and in the vault of heaven, like a gnat, an eagle hangs stationary.

Many have not seen the Maidens' Glen, for it is but a few hundred yards in length and scarce eighty across. Also there is but one way in, and that not simply found. Beyond the red deer and a fox of Calder, no feet ever leave a trace upon the green carpet where, long ago, timidly and ready to die of fright, the maidens of Inverclover came, clinging to one another's waists. There is always in the Maidens' Glen a sense of mystery, whether it be first seen under a midday sun, or, like a witches' hollow, under the moon. It is always windless there, and because the way to the southern world is hewn asunder, leaving a precipice over which a thin intermittent spire of water falls, is finely inaccessible like a sacred place of ancient days. At the entrance to the Glen is a ruined cottage, roofless, with grass growing richly where children long ago had played

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about the vacant hearth. To a crumbling beam over the doorway they tied Joseph and, leaving him to his own sour meditations, walked in silence along the winding track.

Iona and David walking into fairyland.

He laid the basket by the pool in the rocks, looked up the Glen to where the serene brow of Calder was slumbering in the sunlight, downwards to where the low country was shadowed with a faint blue haze, and knew they were alone. The place where they stood held no sound, nor movement, greater than the low song of running water, and the voices of the grasshoppers near at hand.

Iona was walking slowly down the soft turf, but when she heard his quick footsteps she turned and gave a little backward start, and blushed, looking quickly upon the ground and up again.

"Iona," he said, but softly in that quiet place. "Iona, I love you so very much."

She looked up and in her wondrous eyes there cried out all that could be answered—all the sweetness and the purity and the gladness of her love. And then he caught her so quickly to him that she uttered a little cry, but clung to him, and when with a happy laugh he lifted her in his arms, like a lovely child, she laughed too, and slipped her arms around his neck. So they passed down the carpet of grass until he stood where the rock dives clean to the mountain's foot, and there he raised his eyes and looked upon the far-off waste of moor.

"Are you happy, Davie?" she whispered.

"This," he replied slowly, "is like standing at the end of the world."

"And seeing the Promised Land, Davie."

"That's what I meant—seeing the Promised Land. It's what one doesn't deserve—what one dreams of, but never happens."

"Never happens—but it's always here, Davie; and

even in winter it makes a difference to come here for an hour. The world stands still here."

"Let it stand still for ever, darling Iona."

"Can it not, Davie? Is it not possible to be happy always?"

"Why not? Lots of people are."

"Even when one is old, or very poor, or ill—even when things are depressing or miserable."

"We will always be together. Are you afraid, Iona?"

"I? No, I'm not afraid. Would it be better for us, Davie, supposing—supposing we were never called on to face the world and the future?"

"And live here, Iona, like this."

She laid her hand in his.

"I don't know. I was only wondering."

"What were you wondering?"

"I cannot believe—I do not feel, Davie, we will ever go out into the world. Will we miss anything? Will we not be glad we were spared it all—all the years, all the sorrows, all the growing older? But I would like to think of us as brave enough to have faced life, Davie, that was all."

"And we will, Iona."

"Will we?" she questioned, and looked thoughtfully down upon the valley beneath.

"Of course. Think," he added, putting a brave face on it, "think of London, us together, seeing people—you'd like to see people, wouldn't you?"

"If you wish it, Davie."

He gave her a quick look.

"It's you I'm thinking about, Iona."

"Dear Davie," was all she said, a little sadly.

"In life," he reassured her, "things mend themselves. Everything turns out all right. The great thing is trying to do the decent thing if one can, getting the best out of life, not letting oneself be rushed about all day and losing touch. In London——" he broke off

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and drew her two hands into one of his. "But let's chuck it," he said hastily, "let's forget it all to-day."

"Oh please, Davie—it doesn't seem right here, does it?"

"No," he answered, with a touch of wonder in his voice, "it sounds beastly, but it oughtn't to. It's because we're so far from all that kind of thing."

"Till now," she said, rising and looking down on him, "my life has been like this little valley—shut in—shut off—guarded to north and south. And now you have come, Davie, come in through the pass, and I am ready to go. But you won't forget that, will you, dear—you won't be ashamed of me—you won't ever cease from loving me."

"Iona," he cried, springing up, "what have I said to make you speak like that, as though you were afraid. The things I had in mind are silly, feeble, useless, rotten things, but they're part of our future lives, aren't they—real things."

"But isn't this real, Davie—isn't it like our love, something too wonderful for talking about. I never knew what was the secret here till to-day, and it's not only a kind of dream, is it, Davie? We won't step out of it, will we, like untying the pony and going home?"

Again he caught her to him.

"Go on, Iona," he whispered in a stifled voice, "always speak like that. I'm not like you—I don't understand—I haven't thought. My mind's all muggy and dead. But I begin to see afar off, something I saw that night on the road from Drumcairn—something you said. Couldn't we live here, Iona—just ourselves, like people used to, long ago? Life is so deadly to-day, so crushing, so monstrous. You don't know, because you haven't seen it, haven't seen the sort of men and women who come to us."

"I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. But when I think of them

and London, I'm afraid. I was hiding something just now—trying to make the best of it—but it's there, a sort of hopeless feeling as though a chap might fight against it, but it was there all the time, something stronger than me or you, or this place or all the world."

"Davie!"

"I'm afraid of growing middle-aged, like my father and mother, forgetting to-day and becoming settled like they have done—like everybody does. How do I know I'm better or stronger or finer than they are."

"But they love each other, don't they, Davie?"

"I don't know, Iona—they've got used to each other, I suppose. You can see it—anyone can see it, but until to-day I wasn't interested—thought there had never been anything else. But has there, has there? Have they—my father and mother—have they had a glimpse of it too, and doesn't it hold out more than a year or less."

She listened with wide inquiring eyes.

"It's getting settled, house, servants, dinners, church, reading the paper—all the dreary routine of the man of forty or fifty. It's killing, Iona, to anyone. The middle-aged suspect the young—suspect them because they're sometimes reminded, I suppose, how far they've travelled—how different they are—like the stages of a moth or something. And so, when they can, they round on the young—make 'em pay for their mistakes."

"But love, Davie, love's like this little glen—always there if you need it—only sometimes it's summer and sometimes spring."

"There's winter," he added half ruefully.

"That," she replied, "is most beautiful of all."

"Winter here is all white snow. Winter where people are is all beastly slush."

She came close to him and drew down his face to hers.

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"Davie, dear," she pleaded, "these people you speak of may never have been in love at all—they may only wonder whether there isn't something left out. Do not belittle it, Davie—it is only waiting."

"Belittle it? How can you say such a thing. Only something warns me that everything to-day is dead against it, sets traps for it, big traps like wealth, position; or little ones like rubbing along on nothing a year."

"But they should call out love, Davie."

"They should," he admitted, "but they're always there, Iona, ready to hand, and always will be, I suppose, unless——"

"Yes."

"Unless the world changes."

"How could the world change, Davie?"

"How, indeed?"

They went in silence up the green carpet, and beside the pool he kissed her suddenly and, lifting her in his arms, ran with her and set her on a shady rock.

"Sit there," he commanded, "and be the Fairy Queen."

"Oh, Davie dear, I can't ever get down."

"You will stay there," he threatened, "until I have prepared the lunch. When I come for you, you will have the ransom ready."

"Is it a large one, Davie? I am very poor."

But he only laughed and left her.

In the falling of the sun, Iona and David came hand in hand up the Glen of Maidens and, at the head of it, where the spring of water jets up its gushing rill, they stopped and looked back. It was—as always—in-describably quiet with a long garth of shadow fallen like a mantle upon one side. The burn was running darkly, making a hollow sound, and the sighing of wind came faintly from the corries upon Calder.

Upon the moorland far below, a grey mist was sway-



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ing, and further off, like a single pearl on a brown floor, gleamed the Clover loch. They stood there for a time, Iona gazing sorrowfully upon the spot where, on a golden afternoon, the world had indeed stood still. Then turning, she met the eyes of David and the sadness sped away.

CHAPTER XVIII

OLD PATHS AND NEW

IT was eleven o'clock and in the office of Messrs. MacMurren, the Edinburgh estate agents, Francis Manning sat in conversation with Mister John Cairns, the managing director, a tall plausible person, perpetually accustomed to speaking in superlatives and given to large animated reassuring gestures.

"It was most good of you to come so far, Mr. Manning," he was repeating. "You are, of course, a very busy man. Mr. Grahame should be here any moment now."

"This Mr. Grahame," said Francis Manning, "what kind of man is he? Old fashioned I gathered."

Mr. Cairns permitted himself a meaning smile.

"You must not think me disloyal to my client, Mr. Manning," he said, thus condoning anything libellous that might follow, "but to be frank"—another estimable loophole—"to be frank, Mr. Grahame is eccentric—an old gentleman, sir, with rather peculiar notions. Picturesque you may say, and coming from the south—my mother was English, Mr. Manning, and I was born and bred in Kent—coming from the south you will no doubt find him—er—*interesting* and a little *difficult*."

Francis Manning gave him a sharp impatient glance at the end of this utterance.

"Tell me," he asked, "does he know I am to be here?"

"I did not actually mention the name, sir—no," he

rang a little bell, "Miss Duke, in my letter to Mr. James Grahame of Garroch did I refer to Mr. Manning by name. I think not. Please, yes. And Miss Duke—when Mr. Grahame comes let me know." This little ceremony concluded, it appeared that the name of Francis Manning had not been mentioned.

"Thank you, Mr. Cairns. I asked for a purpose of no importance in the transaction."

"Certainly—I *quite* understand," remarked Mr. Cairns deeply inquisitive.

"I gather Mr. Grahame's affairs are——"

Mr. Cairns screwed up his eyes and puckered his mouth.

"It is an open secret," he said, shaking his head, "old methods, old family. Sad. Some of us cannot look on such things without sentiment. At the same time insolvency must be faced—must be faced."

"He has no son."

"No, sir—a daughter, I think. I speak from hearsay. One of our clients, a Mr. Ewing-Dunn, sometimes refers to Garroch. A particularly nice gentleman. He is in a way a rival to you, sir—ha—ha—ha—very good. Perhaps I should not have warned you. Or should I?"

Having conveyed what he trusted would be a fillip to Mr. Manning's intentions, Mr. Cairns was instantly solemn again, and earnestly cautionary.

"The old gentleman will require *handling*, Mr. Manning, *handling*. If I may say so these old-world people need *humouring*—*handling* and *humouring*. They want to sell—they have made up their minds to sell—er—well they *have* to sell," added Mr. Cairns, raising his voice, "but if you so much as take it for granted that they're *going* to sell they're up in arms, sir. Instantly. The truth of the matter is," continued Mr. Cairns in no way discouraged by the fact that Francis Manning was obviously reading a letter, "the fact of the matter is—they are pledged to all manner

of little traditions and what not that we have outlived, sir. To-day—in business—public life—how perfectly ridiculous it would be—ah, I think that must be Mr. Grahame. Yes, here he is—here he is.”

Rising, Mr. Cairns hastened to the door, and could be heard in the passage remarking with a great business of handshaking and laughter, “Ah, Mr. Grahame—to the moment, sir—to the moment. Yes, my client is here,” and then in a low but audible tone, “A charming gentleman, sir—*particularly* charming—deeply interested in country matters—*deeply*,” and again in his normal key, “Let me lead the way, Mr. Grahame. Allow me to close the door. Miss Duke, a moment. Let me introduce Mr. Manning—Mr. Manning, Mr. Grahame, sir.”

In silence the two men shook hands, and Mr. Cairns, flashing a smile at them, cautioned Miss Duke, “We must not be disturbed now on any account, not even by the King—hee—hee,” and closed the door again.

James Grahame in an ancient black coat, green-tinged upon the shoulders, tweed trousers, an historic ebony stick and a tall hat reserved for burials and of a pattern seldom seen to-day, stood for a moment beside Francis Manning, accentuating the other man’s stodgy build, his protuberance, his white face and immense bald head. Mr. Cairns met their eyes in turn, the eyes of Francis Manning, sharp, penetrating, magnetic, the eyes of the Laird luminous, abstracted, remote.

Then, begging them to be seated, he turned to his desk.

“Did you say your name was Manning?” asked James Grahame, inclining his courtly head.

“I did. Perhaps you have met my son.”

“Certainly I have. He has charmed us all. In fact, as you are probably aware, he is living in the Glen. We will all miss him when he goes. We have made an angler of him.”

A shadow of impatience and something deeper passed

over Francis Manning's face, turned attentively towards the Laird. It was like David to find his own level so soon.

"And now, gentlemen," said Mr. Cairns with an outburst of cordiality, "and now, gentlemen, to business. Both of you are here for a particular purpose, is not that so? If I may add without presumption, you, Mr. Grahame, sir, are agreeable under certain natural stipulations—very honourable ones, if I may be permitted to say so—to dispose of the property of Garroch. Mr. Manning here, a client we are most happy to do business with, has conveyed to us his desire to have a chat—a little business chat—between friends, as it were."

In no way discouraged by the indifferent reception his amiable expressions were accorded, Mr. Cairns bent again over his desk, thus conveying to both gentlemen that the grounds were now open to the public.

"Mr. Grahame," said Francis Manning, "I am, as perhaps you are aware, a very busy man. I have not, in other words, time to waste, and as I must catch a train south in forty minutes you will understand I do not wish to dispute minor points."

"Or rather," thrust in Mr. Cairns sinuously, "if I might express it differently—Mr. Manning, sir, intends that you should understand that such points as you may lay stress upon will be accounted minor so far as his generosity is concerned. He is, Mr. Grahame," pursued Mr. Cairns unhappily, "prepared to cast a sop to—in fact, to meet your difficulties *substantially*, sir, *substantially*."

The Laird looked from one to the other, anxious to be as business-like as possible, dimly, increasingly, uneasy.

"For several reasons, Mr. Grahame," went on Francis Manning, and laying his watch upon the table beside him, "for several reasons I am willing to meet you over the purchase of your property. It will suit

me, and you will not find that I drive a hard bargain."

"I think, sir," commented Mr. Cairns, "we can assure Mr. Manning upon *our* side that we are grateful to him and that we in our turn will prove in no way unreasonable."

The Laird frowned his perplexity. His inclination was to prove no less agreeable than this little man with his flickering eyes and rasping sentences volleyed out so smoothly. But there was something behind all this—something that eluded him. It was all progressing so nicely. He had always been told business was no calling for a man of principles, and here everything seemed almost quixotic.

"I will even go further," continued Francis Manning, at which Mr. Cairns laughingly shook his head. "If you will accept my offer, give me rather the first refusal, I will not trouble to look into the details of the estate but accept your estimates. All I want is to settle the transaction. All my life I have found it better business to buy what I really want at a fair price than haggle over second-rate goods."

He stopped short, tilted up his watch, cocked his head at the Laird and obviously awaited a reasoned and reasonable reply. Mr. Cairns waited too.

James Grahame fumbled in his pocket and produced a crumpled piece of paper. Upon it were written certain definite points carefully compiled by the Colonel and himself in anticipation of rushing tactics like these.

"Mr. Manning," he said after some deliberation over the notes, "Mr. Manning, you will allow for a man unacquainted with business procedure, but did I gather that you realise the conditions upon which I am ready to dispose of the property—namely, that I am satisfied that the purchaser will respect the rights of the tenantry?"

"My dear Mr. Grahame," broke in Mr. Cairns, "you

must take our word—the word of a responsible firm—that such conditions as you laid down have received our deepest, our most urgent consideration. When my partner, Mr. Holland, came to me last week and mentioned a certain gentleman, who was interested in the property, I said, ‘Are you quite satisfied, Holland?’ and he replied, Mr. Grahame, ‘No, I’m not.’ That was the end of it. Pardon this interruption.”

The Laird, feeling that perhaps he had offended the susceptibilities of a sensitive man, glanced distractedly at Francis Manning, who appeared, however, to be wonderfully composed.

“There was also the matter of the house,” he pursued after a consultation with his notes, “I hope you understood, Mr. Manning, that the property will be sold without the house of Garroch. I need not trouble with the reasons for my decision, they are purely personal, if you like—sentimental,” and he looked up with the shadow of a smile.

“I am prepared to meet you there,” said Francis Manning briefly.

“I’m afraid I——”

“I want the house.”

“What Mr. Manning intends you to understand,” fluttered in Mr. Cairns, “is, however much he may respect your clinging to old and—er—treasured associations and memories—I’m sure we all, sir, have our little household gods—he is really only too glad to soften the blow; to, in fact, make it worth your while. Is that not your point, Mr. Manning?”

“If you prefer to put it that way.”

The Laird’s face turned a shade sterner. His hand shook a little as he laid down the notes. He was resolved not to lose his temper. He must remember they did not understand.

“Mr. Manning,” he said, “I think you are under a misapprehension. When I made these stipulations I did not do so with any ulterior purpose.”

"No, no, Mr. Grahame," came from Mr. Cairns, "you misconstrue Mr. Manning's words."

The Laird ignored the interruption. At the back of his strange brooding eyes a fire was smouldering, the old fire of race, the tragic flame of the Gael.

"I must explain that Garroch has been the home of my people for centuries. In it are more than the things a man collects and leaves in his will. There is the background of his history, the associations upon which he lives and turns to in hours of distress or affliction, the tradition that is his inspiration. To you it may centre in love of empire. I do not know. It is less local, less conservative—but the same."

"Of course, Mr. Grahame," agreed Mr. Cairns.

"And with it," he went on, "with the honour of Garroch are linked the responsibilities of the land. I cannot sell my people unless I know they will be no worse off when I am gone."

Francis Manning had listened without moving a muscle, interested, weighing every word. He did not dispute the truth of it all, nor its sincerity. He did not say he had a contempt for such opinions. Why should he? He simply, according to his wont, headed straight for the weakest link.

"And what will happen after you are dead, Mr. Grahame; or, if you will pardon this intrusion, if you cannot afford to adhere to these principles. Will your tenantry not fall to the first comer?"

"True," murmured Mr. Cairns, in a musing confirmation and just as though he must, as an honest man, admit it.

The Laird raised his head again. This little man with his cold incurious eyes had driven an instant shaft into a problem he himself dimly foresaw. He had, without an effort, pierced the chink in his armour. A sudden fugitive idea occurred to him.

"Perhaps I move over-fast," he said, and Mr. Cairns smiled secretly, having witnessed many lowerings of

family pride in his career. "I am uncertain, Mr. Manning, whether you are prepared or not to pledge yourself to consider the tenantry. Upon the question of the house I must ask you to regard my statement as final."

Francis Manning reflected a moment.

"I had hoped," he said at last, "that we could conclude this transaction more smoothly. If I pledge myself to allowing the tenantry an extension of lease, which is, I presume, what you want, will you sell the house? A moment, please. Let me explain. With all respect for your scruples, have you considered the future upon a wide horizon? I have no intention of prying into your private affairs, but so far as the tenants are concerned it will surely benefit them more and Inverclover more to have a large house than a small one. It brings business."

"A large house," echoed the Laird at a loss.

"Granted that is true—what remains? Are you prepared to refuse a good offer, twice what any other man will give you? Are you prepared to let your family suffer for your own personal inclination? I hope I am not speaking too personally—I only want to put it to you."

The Laird had risen to his feet.

"What do you mean," he asked, speaking in a high menacing voice, "by a large house."

Mr. Cairns, who was unrolling a long roll of paper, paused irresolutely, foreseeing trouble.

"Let me see," said James Grahame sharply.

Francis Manning had not moved, he merely raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders. He realised at once that he had wasted precious time. Upon the desk rolled out by Mr. Cairns' reluctant fingers lay the rough plans for a vast structure erected upon the site of Garroch, reaching from the river far up the hillside, containing terraces, turrets, hundreds of marble steps, all manner of gardens, and in the centre a dome

of Oriental magnificence. Printed in black ink at the top was written "Garroch House."

Some strangled bitter words burst from the old man, and snatching it from under Mr. Cairns' arm he tore it wildly across and again across and hurled it into the empty grate. Then, standing perfectly still for a moment, he looked from one to the other with blazing eyes and quivering lips, fumbled suddenly for his hat, and, without a word, opened the door and went quickly along the passage.

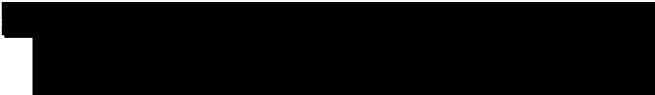
Francis Manning had regarded it all with indifference. In the silence he watched Mr. Cairns ruefully shut the door, took up his watch and remarked, "I would not have shown him the plans."

"I had no idea," wailed Mr. Cairns.

"I know the type," said Francis Manning, and rose to go. "But you'll hear from him again, it's only a question of time—time and lack of money. I want the place and I'll have the place. If the worst comes to the worst let them keep the house. What's it matter? Once the property is mine we can build where we like."

Out in the street the Laird made his way tediously to the station. He had come and he had failed. He had been met with infinite patience, infinite cunning, and the ultimate assurance of money. They would wait—he saw them sitting down to wait—not angrily or resentfully (for anger was out of date in affairs of this nature), but quietly, inhumanly, believing in their hearts that he too was playing a deep game, playing for larger stakes.

In the corner of his third smoker, his tall hat on the rack, his thin hands clenched upon his heavy stick, he stared out on the nearing hills of Inverclover and beheld the dark sea of the future flowing inwards, coming nearer.



CHAPTER XIX

MISS CHRISTINA INTERVENES

I

JULY was passing slowly towards its close, and for David and Iona during those long slumberous days the world indeed stood still. It was as though time were lingering, looking backwards, tremulous of the approaching night. And outside their dream of summer those older ones stood waiting too, silent, intent, a little sorrowful. From Miss Christina the secret had passed to Miss Jean—it was whispered throughout Garroch. Only the Laird, deeply pre-occupied, noticed nothing, moving betwixt melancholy and sudden liveliness, receiving letters of mystery instantly smuggled up into his pocket, and at last departing for Edinburgh in a great flutter of excitement, to return with a very fallen face. To Miss Christina he spoke never a word, but passing her in a bleak silence went swiftly up to his room and shut the door. She knew by her gift of intuition that a crisis—perhaps *the* crisis—was at hand, and so, while her brother-in-law trudged back and forth in an impotent tragic silence she hastened to order the meals that she could have ample time upon her hands. Then, in the same composed fashion she sought Iona, who was awaiting David in the garden.

Iona," she said, "why not take David a run in the pony-cart. It's a fine day and Hamish is wrapping up some lunch. Make a day of it, dear—enjoy yourselves."

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A smile lit up the kindly austerity of her face at the last words—a smile deeply tender, lingering until it was lost in the compassion of her eyes, undimmed by age.

"You are happy, Iona?" she asked.

"So happy, Aunt Chris."

"And feeling stronger as well?"

"I think I am."

Miss Christina sat down upon the couch beside her.

"But are you *sure*, Iona?"

The girl gave her a sudden searching glance, but in her aunt's face was the old steady serenity—no sign of alarm.

"There is David, you see, now. You must make an effort for David's sake—mustn't you, Iona?"

"But I am, Aunt Chris. You don't know how I pray for strength. But somehow it feels like holding back the tide. As though the thing were destined or better let alone."

"Do not give in, Iona—never give in—look forward—keep looking forward."

"Will I ever be so happy again, Aunt Chris? Will I soon not be looking back? Or will our great happiness remain a little longer? It must end soon now."

A curious grim look crept back into Miss Christina's face.

"Why?" she asked. "You mean David's father, your father, the little worries of life?"

Iona nodded rather guiltily.

"You see I'm not like you," she murmured sadly, "and David wonders sometimes too. He does not want to go south."

Miss Christina drew the girl into her arms. She soothed her with low heartening words. . . .

When she rose and left the room David was coming over the lawn, the bright sunlight upon his yellow hair.

II

The Laird paced interminably up and down the room. He had the air of a man who would continue to do so till he dropped. Upon his writing-table near the window lay two tin boxes, a bundle of papers tied with a red band, and a basket of letters upon one end of it. With a sudden vague desire to settle some rankling point he took a stride to the table, swung back the lid of the nearest box, setting free a stream of crumpled papers, which, joining the documents already upon the table, intermingled adroitly, or pushed one another insidiously upon the floor. The little bundles of letters clumsily tied, some with red tape and others with elastic, he snatched out of the stampede, and laid upon a vacant place where they dropped one by one upon the floor or into the waste-paper basket.

It was at that moment Colonel Gask (summoned by a youthful MacColl) entered the room. James Grahame threw down a bunch of papers, left the table, and took up his stand before the fireplace. His face was peaked and haggard, a sullen brooding sense of hurt pride, damped hopes, ultimate calamity, glowed like a dying fire in his eyes. The Colonel after a single anxious glance at him sat heavily down.

"Ye're back early, Garroch."

"I'm back soon enough, Gask," he replied in a low spent voice. "I've seen the agent, I've heard some queer talk, and when I did not toe the line I received, what d'ye think?"

"Not an offer," said the Colonel rather hopelessly.

"An ultimatum, Gask—a notice o' quittance."

"Ye're no joking."

James Grahame turned on him with a flash of anger.

"Do I look as though I were?" he cried irritably. "Have I the air of a man with an easy mind?"

"No," the Colonel admitted hurriedly.



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But the Laird was harking back to the scene in MacMurren's office.

"It's the end, Gask," he said. "We'd better bow our head to what must be. When I have told you the facts give me your opinion. I'll be guided by it. I've heard some home truths to-day—I'm open to more. It'll all come to the same in the end, I'm thinking." He drew in his great chair and sank into it. In the silence that fell the voice of Iona was audible from the garden below.

"I went to MacMurren—am I ever likely to forget it—I refused the offer made by their client, and I returned. Simple enough, ye say. Maybe it sounds so. But the man who has set his heart on Garroch will hold out longer than we can. He knows how I am placed. He said so."

"God," remarked the Colonel deeply stirred.

"If it's not him it'll be another—the world is in the grip of Ewing-Dunns and the like. He listened to all I said with the look of a man who will have what he wants, whether ye like it or no. By force if he could. He would pledge himself to nothing. He just sat offering money, more money. It is his only language. He plays two cards—money and force."

The Colonel stared like a graven image upon the floor. He craved for a cheroot, but knew how even the screech of a match would prove calamitous at such a moment.

"It staggered me, Gask; it made me feel sort of helpless. As though this were not a free country, or the world had changed while I had doddered about here. Perhaps it has—perhaps it has. In that room of MacMurren's words seemed to carry new meanings, a man's honour to be no more than sleight o' hand, no bed-rock any longer—nothing but shifting sand. I cannot explain it—but when I was speaking I knew every word I uttered was discredited almost before it left my lips. I said what I had to say and what was

the climax, d'ye think? You'd never guess. To show how little they accepted my words I was shown the plans for a new Garroch—hark to that—a bonny new house like a hotel."

"Lord," groaned the Colonel.

"At the moment I forgot everything, my age, my affairs, the future—I was *mad*, Gask. But now"—he raised his drawn and pitiful face with its tragedy of broken hopes and despairs. "But now——" he said and bowed his head. The strange apathy, the reaction that had overtaken him had crushed even the burning sense of indignity and oppression.

"Well," he said at last, "if you were me what would you do? Go down in the ruins? Fight against fate? Have I not set a brave face against what must be these sixty years. Have I been rewarded? Well?"

The Colonel lit a cheroot.

"I'd see him in hell first," he said deliberately.

"Easy said, Gask, easy said. But I'm not alone. In times like these there're always the things a man holds dearest to pull him back. He meant nothing—I see it now. It's just that he cannot get a grip of old-fashioned views of things."

The Colonel listened as one might watch the mournful ebbing of a night-tide creeping backwards, full of lamentation.

"What was his name?" he asked quite aimlessly.

The Laird remained for a moment sunken in his chair, his head bent as though he were asleep. Then, gradually, as the words penetrated his dazed mind he began to rouse himself. The blood mounted to his cheeks. He had forgotten. In his overwhelming gloom he had forgotten.

"Manning," he said savagely. "Manning."

The Colonel swore under his breath.

"It's David's father who has set his heart on Garroch. But my duty is clear. Whatever must be, must be—but I'll not have any Mannings hereabouts.

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No—by God—that's final. If we go—we go, and there's the end o' an auld sang. But we'll never run with the hare an' hunt with the hounds. Be silent—I'll hear nothing," and he set off tramping quickly up and down the room, his head very erect and his lips quivering with passion. It had fallen to the misguided Colonel to set the heather on fire.

"Why is that boy here at all? Answer me that? Is it no clear to the merest loonie? Go for David, Gask, ask him to come here. We'll have this out. There'll be no double-dealing here. Did ye hear, Gask?"

"Garroch," said the Colonel, "will ye heed me. I've something to say."

"Not about young Manning."

"Aye. But ye must hear, Garroch. I'll no leave this room till I've spoken."

The Laird hesitated. His head was throbbing. He was feeling miserably tired.

"What is it?" he asked at last.

"I'm to blame," began the Colonel. "Just me. It's I who thocht of an idea. If it's turned out poorly swear at me, Garroch—say onything enters yir heid. I'll sit here willingly an' no answer ye. I thocht——"

"Well."

"That maybe did Davie and Iona,—"

"Iona."

"It seemed to me it would save Garroch."

The Laird faltered for words.

"Tell me," he said hoarsely, "are they friends? Of course they are—but are they——?"

"Keep a grip o' yirsel'—for ony sake keep cool an' temperate."

"Iona—Iona and the son of this man. Tell me—how far has it gone? They're not—not—you know."

"Engaged—an' if they were, Garroch—if they were——"

James Grahame went suddenly still. He stood

bending a little over the Colonel, who was examining with agonised intensity a burnt spot on the hearth-rug. Several times an outburst was so imminent that it seemed inevitable, but each time the Laird crushed it down.

"Iona's but a child," said the Colonel miserably, "an' no strong—she's brightened wonderfully this last month. An' if ye knew Davie——"

"Never speak of this again," broke in James Grahame bitterly. "Let it all pass and be forgotten. It is out of the question—impossible. What was Christina thinking about! Is she doited?"

The Colonel raised his head.

"She's no against it," he said eagerly, "believe me."

"Quite apart from his father, Gask, the thing's beyond argument. What kind o' hash would they make of their lives? Can you see Iona in London in a house reeking with money, shouting money, built and defiled by money? Can you see her with the kind of people who start with a shilling and make twenty thousand a year? Can you imagine this Francis Manning and the things he worships? He would be ashamed of Iona—think of it, *ashamed!* A man with nothing but a full purse, no gentleness, reverence, principles or even brute strength, nothing in the past, nothing but money in the future. And she would be unhappy with him and his wife, would she not?"

"But, Garroch—gently, man, gently—ye forget Davie has no sympathy with his father, and it's a great thing when young folk—ye tak' my meaning—I——?"

"The boy may see further than his father—I think he does. I'm not speaking for myself. I'm guided by principle. When did ever a hill-fox throw a lamb? And could any son o' Manning be untainted? Could he remain untainted when once he enters his father's office? Is broken into his father's commercial routine? Learns to judge motives as his father judges them? Begins

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to win power as his father has won it? Could he save himself?"

"He has no hankering for London at all, Garroch."

"I tell ye, Gask, I'll no sell Iona into a Crystal Palace set on the ashes o' Garroch. I'll see her dead first. You speak of him as though he would disown his father. But poverty calls for qualities that do not fall from a rich man's table."

He broke off struggling for breath.

"Go," he cried suddenly, "go for David."

The Colonel rose dejectedly.

"Garroch," he pleaded.

"I'll not hear a word—will ye go or must I?"

"Ye'll no be hard on Davie."

He waited a moment for a reply, then went slowly from the room.

III

In the drawing-room Miss Christina was standing by the window.

"Does James want me?" she asked him.

"No; he is asking for Davie."

"For David. Why?"

The Colonel wavered.

"He's upset the day," he said evasively, "and he's settin' his affairs in order."

"But how does that affect David?"

The Colonel extracted a cheroot, bit it, and in a kind of mental collapse thrust it into his trouser pocket.

"It's awfu' complicated," he said; "but maybe if ye spoke to him another time."

"David is out," returned Miss Christina, "and I'll have a word with him at once."

The Colonel blenched.

"In that case," he broke in with a great air of recalling an engagement, "I'll just run away the now."

"No," said Miss Christina, "ye'll come with me."

"Certainly," concurred the Colonel. "I only thought——"

But already she was mounting the stairs.

In the library the Laird was hovering over his papers. He started when he saw her, started and then glared savagely at the Colonel.

"What is this?" he asked harshly. "What do you want, Christina?"

"To discuss a matter with you, James."

"No, no," he broke out, rising to his height. "There is a time for everything. Colonel Gask and I are busy upon matters to do with the property—and other things."

"So I gather, James—so I gather. Perhaps the Colonel will be so thoughtful as to shut the door."

"Too late," he said. "You come too late."

Miss Christina, who was sitting composedly near the fireplace, raised her fine head. It was the signal that she accepted the challenge. She seemed to test, as it were, the breeze, winding trouble. For a moment no words passed, only Miss Christina meeting the eyes of the Laird until he turned aside.

And so opened that short-lived duel during which the stalwart and disreputable figure of the Colonel poised distressfully between the two opponents seemed to shrink upon itself, and the Colonel's profile to recede and strive, without marked success, to merge itself in the kindly shadow of his surroundings. It was for him an awful and paralysing moment, being more terrified of Miss Christina than he ever permitted himself to acknowledge, and knowing with a kind of grim fatality that sooner or later the Laird, for all his brave front, would be in desperate straits, and would call on every man of spirit to turn the scale. The Colonel was convinced, at that crisis in his life, that he was *not* a man of spirit, and the thought gave him no sense of shame, but only sadness, as though he were in grave danger of being misunderstood.

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James Grahame fought down his passion.

"Without discourtesy, Christina," he said more quietly, "must I remind you that I have a great deal of business on hand, and that you are keeping not me only but Colonel Gask."

"Hoots," said the Colonel, casting an agonised glance at Miss Christina as though to reassure her.

"I am perfectly aware, James, that hitherto you have handled the business of the estate from these rooms, and that it has been an accepted rule that neither I nor Jean may interfere in what does not concern us."

"Certainly, Christina—I was afraid for a moment . . ."

"Listen, James. Long ago, before I came to Garroch, I managed Invershaws, the finest property in the glen, I farmed the land, ordered the house, and kept the accounts. Every year from the balance I invested maybe two or three or even four hundred pounds in securities."

"I'm not doubting it, Christina, I only tell ye it's too late."

"When I came here I came for one reason only—to mind Iona."

Her brother-in-law inclined his fine head without speaking.

"Her interests are my concern in life—what kind of clishmaclavier ye carry on with your goods is another matter. More than that, David arrived, became our friend, is in love with Iona."

"You knew, Christina—you knew and never lifted a hand?"

"Certainly—I knew. But be good enough to keep your say till I've finished. David came, and Iona took a new lease of life." A shadow crossed her face and for a moment she faltered for words. "Whatever concerns Iona concerns me. I have neither thought for Garroch, nor anything, save Iona. But when on the

top of all I hear Garroch is on the market—I think you'll allow the hour has come for something more than empty scenes."

He shrugged his shoulders, and was instantly coldly aloof.

"I reserve to myself the right to settle my own affairs. Iona is my daughter, and I will tolerate no sentimental notions—*none*. Whatever my misfortunes entail they are no concern of yours. It is strange hearing that a father cannot plan for the best without a clash o' words."

"He can, James, he can plan till he's bald as a coot, but unless he is nearer perfection than you or me or Colonel Gask there's fell risk that his plans'll hatch no prospects."

For an instant he seemed on the point of brushing her words aside. Then, coming slowly back, he sat down in his chair.

"What d'you mean?" he asked.

Miss Christina smoothed a crease in her dress.

"I mean simply this. It is possible both to risk Garroch and Iona. It is also possible to save both. I cannot say more—I could never allow myself to say less."

The Laird raised a face as innocent of understanding as a summer landscape. But Colonel Gask made a last bid for a crumbling throne. Taking courage he cleared his throat and said in a muffled voice:

"There's no room for argument there," and dropped one eye like a decrepit vulture in a desert.

"Surely that's clear to a child," pursued Miss Christina.

The Laird stirred unhappily.

"But, Christina," he persisted, "without an acquaintance with hard facts there's little purpose talking like that. Liabilities are liabilities."

Miss Christina admitted, even encouraged, the point.

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"What are the liabilities?" she asked. "A statement would soon put us in a position——"

James Grahame shook his head.

"It's kindly o' you, Christina," he said, "but it's not a woman's department—let that be enough." He rose again and this time she rose with him. Again their eyes met and again she took up the challenge.

"James," she said, speaking always in the same unemotional tone, "when I make up my mind to a thing I am not to be put off by nonsense like that. I made things easier for ye by mentioning that I know all there is to be known about figures. I can be of service to ye and I will, but I warn ye that I do not speak idly when I say, whether ye like it or no, I can persuade ye to meet me if I care to. But I shrink from it. I beg you to pay a heed to my words. I say *persuade*, and maybe the word's more wholesome than smooth. But I ask it now, and I am waiting. When I have estimated your liabilities I will speak about Iona."

The Laird stole a beaten glance at the Colonel, and the Colonel, knowing the citadel was as good as lost, signalled frantically for immediate surrender.

"As you will, Christina," he said at last.

In the silence that followed the abdication they both watched her approach the desolation upon the table. Sitting down she handled the rubbish without haste, and without consternation, shepherding receipts, accounts, statements, invoices, in a deathly silence, casting out ancient lumber as a captain might clear an overburdened hold. From time to time she made notes in her clear firm hand, verified figures, acted, in a word, in a steady ruthless elimination of chaos that, like the Clover river, flowed onwards to its appointed end.

Long before it was over the two old men knew that the hour of their humiliation (and who knows salvation) was sounded. Once they spoke together in whispers—

a pathetic little attempt to prove their right to liberty of action—but it died away, and again with wonder they stared at Miss Christina, who, with a serene brow, was nearing the end of her investigations. It was a fresh blow to the Laird to notice that she had brought some red tape with her just as though there was not the remote chance that he would resist her overtures. With this tape she reduced the packages to several little bundles, marked the top paper with a word or two in red ink, and placed them neatly in the tin boxes.

"It's bad enough," she said, "but not past mending."

"Not." He shot her a glance of hope, of dawning triumph.

She gave him a steady thoughtful look and sat down.

"I think," she said, "it is time the Colonel was getting home to his tea."

When they were alone Miss Christina drew her chair a shade nearer him.

"James," she said, "the property is sinking through pure bad management. It is no affair of mine, but I am ready to help you. I have some money."

"No," returned the Laird. "No—no."

"We must save Garroch," she said firmly.

"If we can."

She made no answer for a moment.

"James," she resumed, "you think hardly of me—you dislike interference."

"Not hardly, Christina. I am overwrought, that's all. A man at the end of his tether."

"Cannot you trust me? I pledge myself to saving Garroch. Can you not trust me further without asking for my reasons? Just leaving it to me."

"You mean David?"

"But, James, you like him—you often speak of him."

"You don't understand, Christina. I shrink from hurting the boy."

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"And yet you would hurt not only David—remember that."

"Better now than later."

She never took her calm steady gaze off his face.

"I want you to say nothing about this to David—not yet."

He pondered upon her words, seeing no light.

"Why can't you trust me to do what is best? Later we can see. To-night you are tired."

His eyes had closed heavily. He spoke without opening them.

"But, Christina, what is at the back of all this?"

"The hand of God," she said quietly.

Something behind the words aroused him with a sense of dread.

"The hand of God," he repeated. "You mean Iona? Speak, Christina, answer me; you are thinking of Iona. God forgive me, and I was thinking only of my own empty pride. Iona."

The tears rose suddenly to her eyes.

"And David," she said. "Is there not David too?"

He gave her a quick, questioning look then shook his head.

"You do not understand," he said, and held open the door. She seemed on the point of speech, then without a word she passed through, and down the passage.



CHAPTER XX

THE WORLD MOVES ON

I

UNLESS a man is very sharp he will never catch the old-fashioned woman at her tricks. He will, if he is wise, even then never accuse her, or assume an omniscience that will assuredly meet with calamity. For in casuistry and deception, in bare-faced evasion and the art of "keeping going" the old-fashioned woman has nothing to learn. John Parish suspected that Annie rose at some breathless hour, but he had never actually made certain, he had more than once seen signs of housework in sudden cessation, but Annie had smiled at the idea. She always with startling adroitness and ease turned the subject into another channel, and when he came on her carrying a pail towards the front door steps, she merely referred, without changing colour, to the rose bush beside the door, a gnarled and hopeless decadent. Persistence was not in the nature of John Parish, and against the serene and unperturbed operations of Annie Lamont he made no headway, and soon enough ceased to interfere. The gentle habit of taking his breakfast in bed, resisted more feebly for a day or two, was strengthened by her assurance, founded apparently on the rock of absolute truth, that a tray in a bedroom meant less trouble than the laying of a cloth downstairs. It had never occurred to him, but put it in that light he could not but fall in with Annie's wishes. He sometimes asked her whether she was attending



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to herself, keeping up her strength, and who can plead guilty to extravagant habits with the dexterity of the old-fashioned woman? He grew kinder during those few weeks, gentler, and once asked for Snow, which brought such a look of gladness to his sister's shadowy little face that he swallowed his dislike for cats and allowed Snow to curl herself upon the sheet. Through all his thoughts, lying far into the morning, the paper fallen upon the floor, the tray awaiting Annie's gentle briskness, hovered the presence of Iona, until as days passed into weeks his bitterness entered another stage—the absorbing melancholy that has no sharpness in it but carries the mind in a dark circle beyond the current of human affairs. Lying thus in bed with Snow deeply slumbering, he thought of Iona as a child and the days that would never return, of Iona coming to girlhood, of Iona in the empty years that lay ahead. She had entered the house of his life, and she had gone, and now the rooms were vacant, holding no habitation, falling into a pensive decline. In moments such as these he was glad that no longer could he be disturbed—no, not even if she came with David. Were he in his study every click of the gate, every footstep on the gravel would cry, "Here they are," and set his heart beating wildly. To greet them in his study would be too painful, difficult for them all. Some day—perhaps next week—he would go to Garroch and get it over. He might take Annie, did she care to go. Reminded of his sister, John Parish stared at the ceiling and satisfied himself on several points that have always interested persons associated with the old-fashioned woman. It is by these leisurely and cosy intimacies that any man who has taken his M.A., to say nothing of a three-years' course in the theological profundities of a Divinity Hall, should be able to convince his conscience by the light of pure reason that in dealing with the old-fashioned woman, he must not be deluded by good-natured conventionalities. Looking back to

the days of his childhood, he recalled Annie and his mother sitting in a bedroom remote from the frenzied gestures of Dr. Parish, whispering together. There had been no happiness in such a spectacle. In Glasgow, in her married life, it seemed to him as though the blind had waited on the blind, and abided together in the ditch. He was grossly in error there, but the conception was at least sincere. Was it therefore so outrageous to believe Annie when she pled, as it were, on her knees, that he should allow her some scope for the activities that were peculiarly womanly and which, so far as her earlier years were concerned, he imagined had fallen into atrophy? Surely not! The more one thought of it the less reasonable did it appear that a woman, any woman, should find it possible, or be encouraged, to pass her days in idleness. It was the case of Martha all over again—the instinct of a homely woman to keep her hands employed.

And yet receding daily but never quite lost to sight was the thought of Annie rising early, cooking, washing up, wearing herself out, spoiling her hands, snatching in the foolish, perverse manner of lonely women scraps of meals at foolish hours. It was fully five weeks since Mrs. Grant had left, and the question of a successor was not even discussed. He knew that to return to indifferent cooking (for Annie had a light hand), to some consideration of a newcomer's "little ways" would be irksome; and there is always a certain restraint when a stranger is in one's house, a fear of gossip stealing down to the village, tittle-tattle about the minister lying abed, or some other harmless but irritating small talk. The relief, particularly during those trying days following his visit to Garroch, of knowing that whatever he did or said would cause neither curiosity nor remark in the presence of Annie (to whom the ways of men were wonderful and ministers as a race apart) had been and was incalculable.



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It was therefore not without reluctance that he admitted, though he had not discussed it yet with her, that sometime (unquestionably before the autumn) a cook-housekeeper *must* be engaged. It was quite out of reason to think of Annie wearing herself out with all the additional labour of winter, especially as she, being an old-fashioned woman, found her recreation, with admirable results, in superintending parish work, paying calls that otherwise took up a great deal of his time, and in fact relieving him of certain duties that are less welcome to a minister. It was nice for Annie who, all her life, had been, he was convinced, rather tied, to be her own mistress, and if she took pleasure in such activities what right had he to stop her. Better busy than moping in a weary reverie like her poor mother.

These were the arguments for the defence when one morning about ten o'clock John Parish placed his breakfast tray on the floor, put on his dressing-gown and shoes, and made his way placidly downstairs. The front door was open, and Snow, who had followed him, sat down upon the hot stone flag and blinked into the far distance. In the air, in the house, was absolute serenity and quiescence. He walked into the dining-room, also flooded with warm sunlight, and suddenly in the crossing of the threshold the arguments for the defence were shattered as flowers are stricken on a night of frost, blackened, beyond revival.

For on the floor Annie was lying.

For an instant he was paralysed with horror, seeing, as it were with abnormal intensity, the table-cloth wildly rucked, a bowl of flowers shattered on the carpet, perceiving the terrible stillness of her, of Annie who was ever busied about little things.

"Annie." The cry rang through the sleeping house, and was caught up and lost in the encompassing stillness.

He bent beside her, lifted her head, rubbed her cold

hands helplessly, then leaping up rushed from the room and into the hall. In the sunlight Snow was sitting perfectly motionless staring out with nodding head. He hesitated as though he had a thought of finding the gardener, then running upstairs hunted feverishly for his flask of brandy, threw open drawers, ran from one room to another. When he found it there was not a drop inside. Flinging it down he returned to the dining-room. Annie had not moved. With deepening terror he lowered his head and listened.

Then, with a deep breath of relief, he lifted her in his arms, and, crossing the hall, went up the stairs.

II

Before noon it was known throughout the parish that the minister, whatever his faults, poor man, had had a terrible turn and despatched James running like a hare for who do you think? Not the doctor—he came second. Who but Miss Christina, and Inverclover was not prepared to say that he was far out. Without due haste but thinking of a dozen things that might be of service, despatching Hamish for the trap, Jean to the village chemist, Sheila to bide in the Manse for fear she were wanted—Miss Christina put on her hat, took her umbrella as a royal personage might carry some diadem of state, and, without discomposure, but a grim expression on her fine old face, climbed into the pony-cart and sent Joseph scuttling down the drive. In the Manse she took charge from the moment she crossed the threshold. She must have hot water—where was the cook? No cook? She made no comment but gave John Parish a hard look and turned to Sheila. Then removing her hat she walked up the stairs, and, entering the bedroom, closed the door. Shortly after the doctor came, and, nodding to the minister, went quickly across the hall. It was suddenly borne in upon John Parish that he was like



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a man watching the passage of a river, standing always upon the bank. Even Milne, a stupid man in many ways and a nonentity in his home circle, had his moments, controlled the gravities of life and death. . . .

He sat dejectedly in the hall, his head between his hands, waiting for the door to reopen. He was dazed by the suddenness of it all, by the shock of seeing Annie on the floor. His mind revolved round and round the immediate catastrophe, not in a spirit of questioning, but blindly, like a bird in a storm.

While he sat there, scarcely animate, the face of Archie Saunders, "the man wi' views," peered round the corner of the door.

"Is't true about Mistress Lamont?" he asked sharply.

John Parish raised his head.

"What is it, Saunders?" he asked dully. "What is it?"

"I was askin' is't true about Mistress Lamont—that she's at death's door the now?"

"The doctor's with her—I know no more."

To which he shook his head.

"If it was you or me, meenister, but it's never the anes who hev a care for themsel's," and going outside he sat down upon the crumbling edge of the porch, where he was joined by the gardener. All through the day solitary men and women came plodding up the avenue, asked in an off-hand manner how it went with Mrs. Lamont, and returned the way they had come. It was ever so with the old-fashioned woman. . . .

Half an hour and Dr. Milne came down the stairs and beckoned him into the study, closing the door quickly.

"Parish," he said, "this is serious—most serious. Did your sister not tell you she was in a poor state of health?"

"No. Do you mean she has been—been in pain?"

"Must have been. Now tell me why she is so worn

out. Has she been doing too much? Did you not realise that in her condition any exertion might be fatal?"

John Parish shook his head.

"I did not know," he said hopelessly. "I never thought——"

The doctor was tapping a pencil on his teeth. He snatched up a sheet of paper.

"It will be necessary to wire for Alexander at once," he said. "I daren't risk leaving it a day."

"Alexander—the Edinburgh surgeon?"

But he was deep in a penny time-table.

"With luck he should get here this afternoon. Miss Macdougall is arranging all preliminaries. A godsend, Parish—a wonderful woman. Alexander'll bring his own nurse. Good-bye for the present." He walked quickly out of the room, across the hall, and John Parish heard far down the road the clear tinkle of his bicycle bell. He wondered why Milne had not let him run with the telegram. Anything for some trivial little thing to do.

In the hall the sunlight had travelled over the mat and its rays were creeping dispassionately across the linoleum. He saw the white cat rise stiffly and sink down again. In all the world he and Snow seemed the only creatures remote from life and death.

III

It was seven o'clock, and from the room over their heads there was the sound of a step upon the floor and then the same stifling silence.

"It should be beginning now," said John Parish.

"Would you rather I left you," David asked. "Say so, won't you, quite frankly? I only came because I knew you'd be alone—and it's rather awful like this, isn't it?"

John Parish was walking up and down the room



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looking at the titles of his books, picking up a paper and laying it down again. Now he came over to the hearth-rug and laid a hand on David's shoulder.

"I want you to stay if you will. Just sit and smoke and talk about anything. Of course you hardly knew Annie."

"Only a little—I met her first in the train coming here. She said she was coming to give you a hand. I thought her very shy and anxious to fit in——"

He started.

"Anxious to fit in? Don't you think Annie was glad to come, then?"

David shifted uneasily.

"I'm sure she was, but then, of course, it was a leap in the dark, wasn't it? She felt it was her duty, and I'm sure she was very glad when she arrived here."

"Her duty—did she say that?"

"Not quite like that—you will misunderstand me if I don't explain. She was only too pleased to do anything, but of course it was a wrench and, as you must have seen, she's hardly robust."

"Robust? no, I suppose not."

He returned to the bookcase and said nothing for a moment. But in his overwrought mind the words "duty," "wrench," "robust" marched and returned, marched and returned. This boy had learned simple, elementary, obvious things that were only dawning upon him when it was too late. Annie had not wanted to come, had suffered in silence, had with the sacrifice of women, or like some dumb creature, fallen under the load. He was aghast at the clearness of it all. Looking backward, little incidents, casual words, a multitude of stray and sometimes discordant trivialities fitted in one with another. . . . He paused, listening acutely. Again from the room above came a muffled noise, someone crossing the floor and returning—then the awful stillness. He had forgotten David Manning, but as his mind swung back again to Annie he recalled

something said about "taking a leap in the dark." Manning had said it without intention, but the words were true, and Annie had suffered in silence. David Manning did not know—nobody knew—how could they when he had not known himself. It seemed to him at that tragic moment as though all his life had been clothed in falsehood and sloth, and that even now he was in danger of shirking the pursuing truth. What would Annie think of him standing there, saying nothing—accepting nothing? She would never blame him. But what would he think of himself in the utter solitude that might at any moment descend upon him?

"Manning," he said, controlling his voice with a supreme effort, "I want to talk to you about myself. In an hour it may be too late—like a door shutting. I begin to see things indistinctly and until they're spoken they won't mean anything. Don't think I'm wandering—and don't break in, will you?"

He stood for a moment intensely still and again seemed to listen for the faintest sound.

"Looking back over my life," he began like a man fighting against time, "I see that I always did things by halves, was late but never too late, passed but only just passed. I don't blame any one—I blame something in myself. Life is so obscure somehow and a man must never trust his own foolish judgment. My father was notoriously unsuccessful and died a ruined man through overwork. He pled with me to devote every moment to some form of employment—any form. But what did it do for him? Was I so much to blame that I took the other road—thought of life as a jogtrot. Is it a jogtrot or is it not? Ever since I was a boy I have been carried along by a system; school, college, Divinity Hall—one follows after the other. They dovetail each other. And they prepare you for your job—they inoculate you with the traditional atmosphere. I remember sometimes I cried out

against it all—tried to break away—struggled to win clear. But it was always there, Manning, the same men speaking, thinking, dreaming of good assistantships, good parishes, shirking work that does not pay, following the old beaten track. I was one of them. I was never strong enough to say, 'Where does all this differ from the Bar or Medicine? Where does the spirit of Christ come in?' Crude I know—but that's how I used to feel. It's crude but it's true, Manning; it's crushingly true. I don't blame anyone—but I wish to God I had met someone stronger than I, someone who looked on the Church as living, progressive, changing, not a kind of mausoleum erected above the body of Our Lord. I say all this, but who am I to say it? And yet at the back of my mind I have known that I could not deny the watchful, omniscient presence of God—that I could never think of Him as indifferent, a kind of mediæval abstraction. . . . I knew it in the heart of my deep, complacent, slumbering stupidity.

"Lately, since Annie came, I've felt the judgment of God was near. There was Iona. Had I been granted her love who knows I might have pulled up! Who knows? In the bitterness of my disappointment I drifted on—drifted lower. Out of the darkness there has gleamed no light—nothing but apathy. It frightened me sometimes. In this parish is no life. No one regards me as anything beyond a traditional figure. What could I do? When the soul of the Church is dead it requires a man of fire, a thousand men marching together. I've missed everything in life, both the great and the simple. I am double your age and how I envy you for these few weeks you've spent up here. Whatever the future may hold for you—you at any rate have lived, Manning, really tasted the sweetness of life. The joy, the fun, the energy of it—all these you have held in your hand. They may seem trifling to you soon. Over us all—beyond poor Annie and me—hangs the cloud of war. But they are not trifling. That

day on the river, Iona singing that evening—these things are nearer to life, more enduring than the night that is falling. Never undervalue them, Manning, just because the world may be black with tragedy. Turn to them, even the frailest jest, and be grateful. You will think of these days—who knows—long after. They will shine like a star in the gloom. They will preserve your soul from despair. But for me there is nothing. I cannot—dare not—look back.”

He raised his eyes and, looking miserably at David, let them fall again. He was back retracing his footsteps into the past.

“It’s like a cloud, Manning—and I never was what you’d call a spiritual man. But lately—I don’t know why—I’ve been thinking, struggling with things—dragging them into the open. Some day something will happen—and then all the people who’ve been given stones for bread will leave us with our churches, and our halls, and what will it matter then whether we know our theology or not. They’ll pass us without a backward glance, without compassion, and the world will be new, Manning—new.”

The misery had deepened in his eyes and suddenly grew tragic.

“So mean—so poor—so hopeless,” he cried. “Nothing at all to point to—no honest toil—no sympathy—less than a man breaking granite on the roadside. You may say I’m overwrought—I want to be overwrought—I want to suffer—I want to be scorched—all through my life I’ve never lost an hour’s sleep, and in the pulpit how often have I said, ‘What can a man do without suffering?’ But all the time through all the years it was coming nearer—I was building my own catastrophe. A man has but himself to blame, Manning, that’s the meaning of predestination. My whole life has been leading up to this—this is the pinnacle. As other men after years of toil produce a fine book, die in a great cause, so I, who never seem to have

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touched real life, am suddenly faced by this. It was like Annie to come—leaving her home, her memories, casting herself upon a desert island. What has she but the judgment of God? And I thought I was acting unselfishly—afraid she would worry me, while all the time in this Manse, unknown to me, it might have been for years, she was treading the old path, via crucis, the Way of the Cross. Sacrifice—what else is there but sacrifice? In Annie not the great and sounding, going down like a falling sun; just the weary thankless sacrifice of women.”

He drew his hand across his eyes, and stared at David with darkening despair.

“I’ve told you nothing,” he said, and the words were barely audible, “and yet standing over there I saw it written in letters of fire . . . letters of fire. . . .”

“It should soon be over,” he added, and peered at the clock.

IV

It was ten o’clock when David and John Parish left the Manse and walked slowly up the avenue.

At the gate John Parish stopped anxious to return again.

“Manning,” he said, “when Alexander told me Annie would live, I felt that God had taken pity, and when he said she would never be strong—an invalid, I was glad—d’you understand, *glad*. Is that selfish? It is because I am not sure of myself—only feeling my way. But now there’ll always be Annie—someone to care for—to think for—is that selfish, Manning?”

A few minutes and David was far up the hillside taking the short cut to the Upper Glen. To him the obscurity of life had been suddenly revealed. Dangers scarcely dreamed of a month ago confronted him, no longer vaguely as in the Glen of Maidens, but like giant figures striding across his path. Most men never had



a chance to choose the great, the splendid things, and habits of conduct drift like smoke in the wind. There was Iona—there is some woman in the life of every man. How many sacrifices made in silence, made bravely, made ungrudgingly, have risen like unseen incense to heaven! Life suddenly presented itself to him as a vast world of twilight where people moved darkly, impelled by a thousand blind, accepted, misconstrued motives and intentions, whirled onwards, finding no light in the gloom. Pilgrims travelling to an unknown country. What of the future, of Iona, of the life they planned? Would it all end in the same mechanical performance of small and deadening things, would they too never hear the clear unmistakable challenge of sacrifice? Would they settle down as all the world had settled down until Inverclover and the pool of everlasting water in the hills were like a story told to a child in the gloaming? Or would they take up the old unenviable burden of sincerity, of honest endeavour, of burning hope? It was so easy to stand still, to rest by the wayside. The fine, the splendid call, came to few, the world moved onwards not in a blaze of opportunity but in a tedious necessity. Young and old, famous and obscure, they passed and passed, and none could tell whither they travelled. Looking back over his short life David saw in it only coming and going, rising and lying down, until Iona. . . . What of the morrow?

The moon rose over the shoulder of Calder, and, turning, he looked down upon the valley beneath. The yellow light from the study window still shone through the clump of trees around the Manse. It was like an omen, a beacon lit to proclaim an immortal truth. In the pallid moonlight the ancient tower of Garroch stood finely up against the dark hillside. And to David there came an answer, a pledge—something that was not James Grahame, nor Iona, nor Miss Christina, nor the sacrifice of Annie Lamont, but all of



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these and infinitely more, part and parcel of his own soul and of all the world, reaching out its hands into the unknown as though the past were crying to the present, "I bring you the best of me—make of it the promise of the future."

v

And already even as David walked onwards the hour of destiny had struck. Suddenly, in the passing of a night, the old world was sundered for ever from the new. From that hour of midnight the smiling comedies, the harmless joys, the kindly insignificance of life held no further place, but haunted (and would haunt) the gloom of other days. Such things passed, knowing they would return, inseparable companions of human pilgrimage. For awhile the children of security had become the children of chaos. What would each bring, as a wise man reveals his treasure, to lay down at the feet of necessity? Gradually, reluctantly, would ineffectual things be cast aside, torn aside, or trodden sternly under foot. Love of life, love of wealth, love of ease. In the end, who could say what wreckage would return to shore. Upon what rock would they pledge their trust, upon what unassailable hope would they withstand the storms of those calamitous years?

Out of the night was dawning a new heaven and a new earth, and even now, by day, and in the darkness, there was a muffled stirring, feet were hurrying, the feet of the conspirators, messages were passing through the air, under the sea, armies were assembling.

As of old the hour of the unknown men had struck. For them as in ancient days and for ever was the burden ready. From lonely cottages unheeded for a score of years, from the highlands and the lowlands, from the slums and the small suburban streets would they soon be coming. From all the world would the legions of unknown men be marching and counter-marching, stamping frozen feet, defending grimly patches of



broken country, burying each other in the rain of a winter night. From now onwards would the unknown men keep vigil opposite one another, in the darkness, thinking of kindred homes, and kindred loves, piercing the frail tenure of such dreams at the stark point of the bayonet. In all of this would be no pageantry, no blare of trumpets, no splendid vaunting—nothing but mud and blood and hideous, sickening waste.



CHAPTER XXI

THE EPIC OF THE GLEN

I

THE autumn was painting the Inverclover woods in yellow and gold, and claret when, upon a Saturday afternoon, John Parish, leaving Annie asleep, went softly out of her room, and down to the study. "The Scotsman" lay open upon the table just as he had left it in the morning. In the room was the abiding solemnity of October, the after-glow of summer still lingering in the frail sunlight that cast its errant rays upon the floor. The face of Nature was placid and indifferent, and yet as he looked out upon the pleasant prospect of the Clover Woods and saw the blue reek of Colin's fire rising as mysteriously as an ancient sacrifice—he knew it all for a false and uncertain security dependent only on the lives of men. Far away, but not so far, the harvest was trodden black with myriad feet, the trees so wonderful in their autumn grandeur were splintered and rent, the fertile land was ploughed not with the jingling team, but scored by shot and high explosive. Commonplace reflections, but shared in those anxious days by every man.

To John Parish the war had come as more than a crusade—it carried within it the promise of restitution, amendment, sacrifice. He was strong, looked younger than he was, was unmarried. Into his life Annie had come touching it with new tenderness and understanding. He suffered daily. In the slow awakening



of John Parish the burden was slipping not in its completeness from his shoulders but gradually torturing him as it fell. He had loved Iona, but now he knew how greatly he could have loved her. He had not been dissatisfied with his life, but to-day he realised how limited had been its boundaries. He had lived all his days as a man apart, mixing only with his colleagues, accepting their code, thinking their thoughts, he had been content, nay ready to defend the isolation of the clergy as a desirable and appropriate condition. He and his fellows had even taken a kind of smug pride in the silence that overtook ordinary men when one of their cloth entered their presence. It was for them to uphold the tradition that Christianity was not within the hail of every man, but to be doled out by right of clergy, and buried deep beneath the dogmas of mediæval thought. To-day how foolish, how wicked it all seemed. To-day, as always in times of crisis, the Church was standing aside, not because she was unsympathetic, or indifferent, or anything else but the historic spectator, or the ancient well from whose waters a man must travel to drink. Nor was there any enmity against the Church—it meant simply that the unknown men had so long been taught to regard religion as a Sunday observance and of interest to leisurely persons that the breach dividing the war and the clergy seemed as far apart as the poles. John Parish knew it, and, as he stood looking out, he craved to march shoulder to shoulder with the unknown men, to share their hardships, to become as modest, as brave, as obscure as they. And then if he returned things would be different. He would no longer meet them on the road as a missionary might beam upon a naked savage, but frankly, decently, as one ordinary man meeting another. The thought of it gave him the purest emotion of his life. It stirred him very deeply. He would not go as a chaplain, of that company who strive so splendidly to crush the traditions of centuries. He was not strong



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enough for that. He would enlist in the ranks, they would never dream he was ordained, and sometime it might be given him to speak the immortal truth when he and the unknown men were standing together upon the great threshold. . . .

There would follow, were he spared to return, the period of reconstruction, men entering new lives with eager questioning minds, dissatisfied with the old stupidities of days before the war, crying out for something finer, less insular, moving beyond the desolating touch of international hatreds. And more than that. He knew that in those far-off days, separated from him by the night of bloodshed and anguish, would succeed the period of irresolution, reaction, uncertainty, the hour of crisis out of which a new kingdom of God on earth might arise like the dawn, or might vanish for centuries from the destinies of men. Old wine and new bottles! In that day would they be ready, the priests of treasured ceremonies and empty tabernacles, would they be standing humbly, their petty feuds forgotten, their eyes set on the rising sun? He was assured that they would not. He was full of an overwhelming, deadening certainty that when the hour struck they would be calling from a hundred denominations, pitifully, forlornly, as the ancient priests of Druid must have cried to the children of light. There would be the men of words, of sounding arid sentiment such as Dumble, greeting a morning star peculiarly their own; there would be the Kerrs, dour, pledged foes to passion, and the healing of old sores; there would be the Romanists, impregnable to spiritual progress, highly organised, the stronghold of Authority; the anxious Anglicans, a camp divided against itself. There would be all these standing blindly in the road. And beneath the stress and urgent searching of those years, when men of every nation, the unknown men, the ignorant men, must bear and drag the old burden of tradition upon their shoulders, beneath all this

turmoil would be other forces, modern conflicting forces, moving in the darkness, moving swiftly. There would be the Mannings, planning for supremacy of trade, scheming, holding back the clock, as reactionary in their dreams of power as the most feudal baron in his mighty keep. In the country would be the ageless fight for the land, broken men helpless in the hands of Ewing-Dunns. In the great towns capital would be conspiring, controlling, repeating, through the press, the old distracting catchwords. Strife would be simmering, unemployment would walk the streets, class hatred would be scrupulously tended. Party antagonisms would resume their tragic inconsequence, while, at the bed-rock, a thing unchecked even in the moment of awful crisis and once again protected, nourished, feared, like some monster of ancient story, deleterious liquor would hail a new chapter in its history of national decay.

In that vision of the future he saw the armies of the young marching homeward, no longer the innocent, the eager, the strong, but broken men wearied by months or years of tedium, exposure, and suffering, men sick to death of it all, men physically, mentally, morally collapsed. And suddenly, beyond denial he knew that for him (however stupid, however fumbling he might be) the road of duty did not lie towards the fields of death, but pointed the less tolerable highway of life, that, in those months or years that faced him, that faced them all, there would be empty homes, anxious homes, homes in want—that, gradually, insidiously, in the night of doubt and sorrow the pilgrim band would not march resolutely onward but stand overtaken by mist, seeking forgetfulness, distraction. . . . He knew that his chance had come, that the path of his own redemption, no martyr's way, only the path of ordinary duty, was open now as always. He must set out and run his course with fortitude, knowing the time was brief for all that



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must be done. He had his own campaign to fight, his own victories to win. First he must earn the trust, the love of Inverclover. He must break down the barriers of many years. He must hold them together in patience and courage until the men returned, and, in that fight for the future, in that calamitous period of readjustment, he must stand by those who had borne the incessant tension of uncertainty. He knew how soon the early fervour of the war would be overshadowed by its kindred penalties; how casualties would lose their first tenderness of pity; how the flaming cause for which they fought would be smirched and bedraggled in the passage of those arduous years. Pain, mutilation, even death would be the commonplaces of life. The national conscience would be hardened as the crust creeps over a dying Vesuvius. What if in the end, in the dawn of peace, only an exhausted, apathetic nation, like some aged beast, heavily scarred, remained, all its swift energies a dream of other days. . . .

He would need greater strength than he felt he could rally. He remembered Iona. There was a tower of support in Garroch and all therein. He took up his hat and went quickly, with fresh courage, out of the Manse and up the avenue. . . .

II

When he reached the village he beheld a wonderful sight. For coming up the narrow roadway was Colin playing his bagpipes, and behind him, marching side by side, the Colonel, a noble figure in an ancient uniform, and the Laird with his head held very high. And after those two historic persons came Glenclover in a solid mass. John Parish had forgotten there was to be a recruiting meeting.

Near to the end of the village is an open patch of moorland with a heavy slab of rock lying solitary like

a citadel in a lonely place. Upon this the Colonel struggled, and in the deep silence and with a voice reminiscent of forgotten barrack squares began to speak. He was of the old world, the world when a battalion of the Black Watch could quell a native rising. He gave place to that older, ageless cry that reaches straight to the hearts of men, the cry of race and the memory of other days. The Laird, his white hair fluttering in the breeze, his thin hands gesticulating, in his eyes the passionate fire of times when a Grahame could bring men at his whistle, was rousing the remnant of Inverclover. No longer was it the twentieth century. No longer were the thoughts of James Grahame old derided thoughts, or his presence a kind of quaint survival. Had his life achieved no other purpose in its seventy years of brooding, the clock had struck at last for the ancient simple things, and the old forgotten paths. A hush passed over the grim upraised faces, and a latent glow such as shone in Covenanters' eyes was lighted once again. Amongst those lonely hills, through every century, whether it be the cause of kings or the cause of right, the man who sets fire to the beacon will hear the tramp of feet from a hundred glens. John Parish, on the outskirts of the gathering, was fired by the passionate glowing words, words dear to the Gael, summoning up the sacred memory of his tragic past. Could he but touch their hearts with half that magic cunning?

Assisted off the rock James Grahame stood beside the Colonel, and in the silence a shepherd from Upper Calder elbowed his way through the crowd and approached them. The Laird shook him by the hand, and there were three men with their backs to Garroch and their faces set to the south. A moment and they came in ones and twos and at every recruit the women, the bravest of the brave, raised a cheer, and looked for who would step out next. There was Duncan Haggis who sauntered up as though he were really on his way home,



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there was Donald Kilgour, Peter Mackay, and two Grahames from Drumcairn way, upon whom the eye of the Colonel had been glued this fifteen minutes. And then when the crowd had thinned, and Colin was fingering his drones, a little man walked quickly across the open space and for the second time was shaking the hand of James Grahame. It was Archie Saunders.

Again the pipes struck up; under the hoarse commands of the Colonel they formed in line, numbered, achieved the queerest evolution (turning several ways at once but all greatly to the admiration of their womenkind) and marched triumphantly off towards Garroch. The tramp of their feet began to fall into silence. To John Parish the scene was infinitely touching. He had known them all so long, many of them since they were boys, some of them since they married and had children of their own.

To the casual onlooker they went shoulder to shoulder marching from now onwards, placing their lives, their bodies, their little independencies and weaknesses in the hands of a vast system, sleeping, eating, fighting, dying, according to an encompassing scheme in which they were known by discs around their necks. To John Parish, watching them ascending the opposite hill, a little trail of dust hanging about their feet, and afar off the plaintive, ageless cry of the pipes, they were not insignificant—he looked upon them with envy, knowing, however obscure to the great world to which they would soon be drafted, that they carried the immortality of the unknown men beside which the pagantry of fame and authority is a mockery and a humiliation.

III

In the drawing-room Miss Christina was awaiting him. She closed the door, and asked him to be seated beside her on the couch near the window. Outside

the clear, penetrating voice of the Laird was heard above the low rumbling, and the clink of tea cups.

Inside Miss Christina was speaking quietly, telling him about Iona, that she was weaker, that they must be prepared for the worst.

"I want to tell you, Mr. Parish—to acquaint you with the facts. You have asked me nothing during these last few weeks. I hope I have not been inconsiderate to you."

"No—no," he faltered.

"I know how fond you are of Iona. Until David came you were her greatest friend. You have made a great difference in her brief life. It has been kind—very kind of you."

He shook his head sombrely.

"When I tell you that Sir Joseph Preston said unless Iona rallied there was little hope, perhaps you will realise how difficult it would have been to have sent David away. Was it selfish of me to let him risk his happiness? Some would say it was. I took the risk that David might blame me someday."

John Parish stirred unhappily.

"David has not blamed me. When he left here a night or two ago he thanked me—he thanked me for giving him the greatest, the most enduring possession in life—I repeat his own words." She bent her head and sat for a moment in silence.

"I think," she said in a low voice, "David is to be envied—whatever happens to Iona—to be envied. Perhaps you agree or do you not?"

"I agree," he murmured.

"Whatever may happen—and to-day we are all in the hands of fate—whatever may happen they at least have lived their happy hour, and never awakened to the dour side of things. I cannot say what would or would not have come to pass in the future had Iona lived and this war never broken out. I only know that I never had my doubts. I knew I was acting for the

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best. During these few weeks no shadow has fallen across their path, their love has been brief, but there's some of us would willingly pledge our years for an hour or two of what can never be now."

"True," said he, "only too true."

She made a little gesture, lifting her fine hands and letting them fall lightly again upon her black skirt.

"David is going to the war," she went on. "Against his father's will he is setting out to prove himself. I cannot see cause for regret in that. Looking at David in his simplicity, his loneliness, his unfitness for all that faced him, it may be better—I cannot say. These things are all in God's knowledge, Mr. Parish. Behind it all there must be some better order of life wrung into being by suffering and death. Who can say? One can but hope to touch a hand in the darkness."

John Parish raised a stricken face. Miss Christina gave him a quick disturbed glance. "Tell me, have I said something to hurt you—surely not."

He grappled for words that evaded him.

"Iona," broke from his lips at last. "I love Iona. You speak like that but it is all different for me. It is I who am out in the darkness—blind groping darkness. I know all about David. I thought I had conquered myself—that the worst was past. And to-day I had planned—planned for the future. About myself. Getting at grips with life. I depended on Iona. I am one of those who cannot stand alone. If I stand alone I—I—falter. I lose heart. And now Iona is crying good-bye while I'm only opening the door—that's it—just fumbling with my foot on the step—watching the people passing in the street."

Miss Christina listened gravely, saying no word, making no sign. She did not hasten to sympathise, to soothe, to encourage. Most important of all, she did not mention poor Annie Lamont. She just bided her time until his broken words had ebbed away.

"Mr. Parish," she said quietly, "I'm glad you've



told me this. You will find that I respect such a pledge of friendship. I am an old woman, whose feet lie far back in the past, but I am strong and have no reason to believe I shall not live for many years. Could you not speak to me of the things that trouble you, that will face you more and more as the war goes on? I am always here; until I die I shall be always here."

For a while he did not speak.

"Thank you," he replied at last, "thank you. I shall not forget."



CHAPTER XXII

LIFE AND DEATH

I

IN the bleak February evening, with snow heaped high against Garroch and a kind of stricken silence inside and out, Hamish, strangely attired, and holding a hat in one hand popped his head round the kitchen door. Inside, sitting miserably at a considerable distance from one another were Mrs. MacColl and Sheila. The professional eye of Mrs. MacColl drifted mournfully from the grate to the candlestick on the mantelboard, and grew moist at the sight of the kettle simmering contentedly.

"The leddies are in the sma' room," said Hamish hoarsely, "an' for mercy's sake give yir bonnet a poke, Margaret—it's a' askew."

"It weel nicht be," retorted Mrs. MacColl with a sniff, and added with some irritation: "Sheila, for ony sake blow yir nose—ye mind hoo Miss Christina abominates a snuffle."

"As saftly as mice," warned Hamish, "lift yir feet, Sheila, and dinna plank them doon like a filly—if ye bring the Laird oot on the landing look to yirsel' for I'm awa' doon the drive."

In this mysterious fashion and with all the gestures, shrill whisperings, agonised nods, and frowns, peculiar to honest persons acting covertly—the family of MacColl crossed the hall and made their way to the sma' room upon the door of which Hamish administered a

low knock and ushered his relatives within. Seated at the table where all household accounts, wages, interviews and other ominous businesses were transacted were the Miss Macdougalls, both, but particularly Miss Christina, majestic in black gowns and white lace caps as befitted the occasion.

"We're here, mem," said Hamish lugubriously and addressing, as always, Miss Christina.

"An' sorry we are to be in this position," broke out Mrs. MacColl, her mouth quivering.

"Now understand," said Miss Christina sharply, "what must be, must be. Hamish, your wife's working herself up."

"She will, mem—she will—I've seen it in her een for days." He hurried the abject figure of his wife aside. "Margaret," he whispered, shaking her despairingly, "Margaret, woman, think of yir faither eating tripe—hee—hee—that always sets ye lauchin'. Na, na, it's no use, leddies, she's long past heedin'—she must hae it oot the now."

Miss Christina broke off some private business with Miss Jean, and stared with resentment at Mrs. MacColl.

"My man," she said to Hamish, "I've no leisure to bide here till cockcrow."

"She's owre stout, mem, for the emotions—and" (apologetically) "a Dumfries body."

That, of course, explained everything.

"Let Sheila take her back to the kitchen," said Miss Christina finally. "Come, Hamish, sit down there."

Again the two old ladies discussed a point in a remote isolation, like mountains conferring together, while the wreckage of Mrs. MacColl was assisted from the room. Then, at the dejected closing of the door, Miss Christina turned briskly upon the butler.

"Ye've been hereabouts a long while," she said.

Hamish stirred uneasily and, casting one poignant glance at the two ladies, stared hard at the table.

"And it would be wrong were we to let ye go without saying that it is through no fault of yours. We are sorry to lose you—eh, Jean?"

"Very sorry, Hamish."

He bent his head still lower, and fumbled with the handkerchief in his trouser pocket, distractedly pulling it out and gripping it tightly in his hand.

"But times are not what they were, and who can foretell the end of this German iniquity. If victory is to come to the folk who hold out the longest then Garroch'll not be the first to go—eh, Jean?"

"I should think not," returned her sister with kindling eyes.

"It's early days yet, mem."

Miss Christina turned with superb scorn.

"Hark to that, Jean," she said, "*early days*. Did ye ever hear such a feckless daft, easy-going southern sentiment. Early days—and how, in the name of conscience, do ye expect to meet the late ones. There's very little of the squirrel about you, my man."

Upon Hamish, who had never regarded that creature with anything but indifference, the insinuation which seemed to him unsympathetic, left an impression of painful uncertainty.

"Miss Jean and I," resumed Miss Christina, "have decided that after your departure we'll run Garroch ourselves."

"Mem, mem, not——" Words failed him in his need.

"I can see no obscurity in what I said, Hamish. Have ye any reason to believe that Miss Jean and I are not competent to mind the Laird and Miss Iona?"

Hamish shook his head dumbly. He was perfectly certain that Miss Christina could run the Caledonian Hotel, Edinburgh, did the notion take her. He took out his handkerchief, rubbed his nose in a melancholy manner, and again stared with emotion at the table.

"Here," said Miss Christina, "are your wages, and in this envelope is a little remembrance."

"Na, na, Miss Christina—eh, leddies, I canna hev it—come, come."

"Hamish, control yourself or I'll order you from the room. Have ye no sense of decorum or self-respect left?" (This in distant allusion to Roman Catholicism.)

"It's ma cold, mem, ma cold in the nose."

The little envelopes with the names of Mrs. MacColl, Sheila, and Hamish written precisely in Miss Jean's elegant hand were pushed over to the butler, who took one single glance at them, and looked like a dog about to raise its head and howl.

"It's no the wages we want," he wailed, "and what kind o' purpose can it serve us sitting at oor ease in the Lodge no twa hundred yards distant. The very thocht of ye wrestlin' wi' the kitchen grate that hes needed coaxin' an' wheedlin' these mony years will mak' us a' miserable. An' the cows, mem—they must be milked. Sheila couldna' bear to hear thae cattle hoastin' their throats oot for the pail."

"Miss Jean knows all about it, Hamish," remarked Miss Christina stiffly, "and as regards the kitchen fire, as I instructed Mrs. MacColl long since how to save a bucket of coal between midday dinner and five o'clock . . ."

"Of course, mem—of course—who doubted it? But what kind o' part are we takin' in the war biding idle at the Lodge? Can we no tak' a hand even for the mornin' an' give the house a dicht roond at sundown. It nicht," and he made a pathetic hint at slyness, "even be dune contrary to yir wishes or desires."

Miss Christina's face softened. For the first time in the long experience of Hamish her voice faltered for a moment.

"It is a matter of principle," she said quickly, "and

there it must bide. Miss Jean and I have settled we must economise, and economies should fall heaviest on those who see their necessity. To keep unpaid servants is demoralising. How," she said with a faint smile, "could I reprimand you with any satisfaction to myself or to you?"

"Mem—mem, ye *would*—it's born in ye," protested Hamish eagerly, "it wouldna' be Garroch without a wee word in season."

Miss Christina looked at Miss Jean and back again. "It cannot be, Hamish, so there's an end of it." She paused and then more hurriedly, as though they had tarried over long: "There remains one thing. Mr. Grahame is failing these days and there can be no use in troubling him with this change. We depend upon you, Hamish, and Mrs. MacColl to be discreet. Should the Laird meet you bid him good morning just as though you were still here."

Hamish nodded dolorously.

"An' Miss Iona," he said. "Maybe she will not be doon awhile."

"To-morrow Mr. David comes on short leave. It may be judicious that you should be in Garroch to-morrow. After that——" Her voice suddenly halted.

"Mem—is it the young gentleman's last?"

"It is his last."

Then Miss Christina rose to her feet and extended her fine strong hand across the table. In the sma' room it was the recognised ceremony that established and concluded such occasions.

Hamish started and realising its significance to the full, held her hand for a moment, bowed to Miss Jean, and went quickly from the room, closing the door behind him. His footsteps trailed dismally away. Half-way down the passage he must have dropped one of the envelopes, for a shrill clatter broke the grey stillness. In the sma' room Miss Christina entered

certain figures in a little book, added the list, checked it, drew two lines underneath the result, thus closing the account for services rendered.

Through the falling snow James Grahame came painfully up the drive. Hamish, peering through an upper window, had seen him long since and groaned over the foolishness of it all—just a frail old man doddering in other folk's business. The sight of the Laird labouring through the drift, pausing at times to cough, his thin shoulders white with snow, sent him running downstairs and opening the door.

It was after two o'clock, a dark and mournful winter's day. In Garroch was no sound at all. Upstairs in her room Iona was lying with the firelight playing shadow-dance upon her bed, a little clock ticking away the minutes that separated her from David's coming. In the sma' room Miss Macdougall was attending to accounts, and, like a skilful general, making her plans for the future. Dividends were dropping, food was certain to rise and go on rising. The room was dark and without a fire, but such things were trifling to Miss Christina. Downstairs Miss Jean was cutting sandwiches for tea, buttering scones, and polishing the massive silver tea-pot.

The Laird passed slowly through the open doorway.

"That you, Hamish," he said.

"No less, Laird—no less, sir."

"A heavy day."

"It's no fit for ye, Laird."

The old man made no reply, but, allowing the butler to draw off his coat, sat heavily down and was overtaken by a fit of coughing.

"Hamish," said he, "'The Scotsman's' in my pocket. No—I have no wish to see it." He stared a moment at the floor. "This is not war," he said with a sudden flash of anger, "it's butchery—sheer devilment—no honour, no decency."

"Laird, Laird, ye mustna' give in."

"Give in—who's giving in?" Again he lapsed into silence, "And yet I'm feared I am," he murmured, "I feel terribly old and done the day—and strange, Hamish, as though I were walking in some other world."

"We all feel that, Laird—it's the war, ye ken."

"Do you, Hamish," he asked eagerly, "do you?"

"At least those of us over fifty."

"Fifty—aye, that's the dividing line. What age am I, Hamish?"

The butler eyed him hurriedly and stooped over his boots.

"Ye canna be short o' saxty-five, Laird."

"Add ten years and ye'll not be far out—as finely ye know."

He rose stiffly and wandering into the dining-room mixed himself a whisky and water and drank it slowly. A momentary spark of vitality flared up in his exhausted face.

"Come, Hamish," he said, sitting down again, "have ye no news the day? What of your son Jock, who told us the Germans were surrendering in thousands, eh?"

The butler raised a hand to his beard and let it fall again.

"He's no written lately," he said quickly. "Shall I tak' off yir boots, Laird?"

"Not written—he's not sick, Hamish?"

The butler fidgeted a moment with the knotted lace.

"No, Laird, he's deid," he said simply, and drawing the boot off laid it on the floor.

In the sharp silence that followed James Grahame stared hard at the stooping figure beneath him, made as though he would speak and then uttered a heavy sigh.

The old servant, agonised by an admission that had

been drawn so unexpectedly from his lips, lifted off the second boot.

"Sheila read a fair screecher in ane o' thae weekly papers the ither day," he said desperately.

"Did she, Hamish, did she?"

"It was a tale o' a shepherd frae Lochnagar."

James Grahame watched him as one might listen to the crying of a wild bird.

"The shepherd was called John MacRisk, ye ken—or may be it was MacLisky—wha had a second cousin in Skye called Rory More, an' one nicht, a glum kin' o' nicht, they reached the ferry taegither—ye're takin' it in, Laird?"

"Aye, Hamish—how dark it's getting, eh? My feet are damp, are they not, or is it the cold?"

"Just cold, sir. Weel, the ferry only taks ane passenger at a time (yon was the old ferry, ye mind—they've a gran' one the day), so MacLisky says to old Dougal the ferryman—weel I remember him—he says, 'maybe there's only room for me, Dougal, or wull ye tak' More?' 'No,' says old Dougal, 'I canna tak' more than ane.' 'Then,' says MacLisk, 'tak' More the now.' 'But I can only tak' ane,' says Dougal, thinking the man daft—ye see the joke, Laird?" he inquired anxiously. "It's a play on words. Can ye no raise a wee laugh?"

James Grahame had risen and was standing with bowed head.

"I mind Jock carrying my rod the last time I fished the Loch," he said suddenly. "He must have been ten or maybe less."

The butler looked out of the window, the boots hanging from his right hand.

"He was eleven, Laird. Jock was always undersized an' no over robust."

II

Iona stirred suddenly among her pillows.

"Father," she said, "is that you?"

He was sitting before the fire, his thin hands catching the warmth. At her voice he started from his reverie and came over to the bedside.

"It is growing dusk, father, and David has not come."

"The afternoons close in, Iona, and there is more snow hanging over Calder. But he will come."

"Oh," she said with a little smile, "I was not afraid of that."

"Is it the light you want, then?"

"No—not the light. Tell me, father, have I changed much in the last few weeks? Would you say I was—different? David was unhappy about me when he came in October. Do you remember? I do not want him to go away unhappy to-day."

He stood by the bed saying nothing, only looking pitifully at her.

"To-day, *now*, would you say I was so ill? Oh, father, can you not see—don't you understand?"

"The light is deceptive, Iona, and the bed is in shadow. But with the lamps——"

"I meant *without* the lamps," she said quickly. "Just as we are now, a low fire, and—and would anyone know? Would David know?"

"I do not think so," he said sorrowfully. "I think he would not know, Iona."

She sank back into her pillows, and he returned to the fireside.

Her voice came to him from the shadow. "Talk to me," she said in a voice full of sleep, "talk to me, please—until David comes."

Seated again in the easy chair he stared into the fire, and again she spoke as it were from a great distance.

"Were you very much in love, father—once?"

He reflected absently.

"In love? I suppose so, Iona."

"Can't you remember it all clearly?"

"It's all so long ago—nearly half a century."

For a time there was silence.

"Do you ever think how much older than she you will be now?"

He smiled grimly.

"I am getting so full of aches and pains, my dear, I've little time for fanciful notions."

"Was she very lovely, father?"

He coughed and drew his handkerchief across his lips.

"I suppose so," he replied, "but have you not seen the miniature in the drawing-room? They said she was the pick of the Macdougalls, and both your Aunts Christina and Jean were good-looking once."

"And are to-day," she put in quickly.

"To be sure, to be sure, but none of us grow younger, Iona. I am speaking of forty years ago. I used to ride over the shoulder of Calder every morning before breakfast and every evening wet or fine. It's humour-some in a wae fashion looking back. When I mention it things come tumbling one after the other I had thought forgotten for ever and a day, until I wonder whether the young man on the pony is not a hero I've read about in Scott. But it's myself, Iona, and I dare-say I made a decent enough showing," he added, smiling in the firelight.

"I expect you were very much in love."

"I suppose so, Iona. Love's a strange business. It starts so blithely and then—but it's natural enough."

"Then what, father?"

"Why, it kind of settles down and maybe it mellows like port or smoulders away—just smoulders away."

"For want of fuel?"

"Aye, for want of fuel."



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"They are lucky then who retain their love and carry it onward with them—together. Even if it hasn't lasted long."

"Few would dare to say so."

"And yet it is true."

For a moment he nodded at the fire."

"Sometimes," he said sadly, "they are to be envied."

"But would you not have given the world to follow when she died?"

He puzzled it out, knowing it was of his first wife, not her mother, that Iona spoke.

"We were neither young then," he replied at last, "that makes a difference."

"Supposing she had died when you were engaged?"

"Perhaps," he replied, "but it is so long ago now—how can I say after fifty years?"

She lay back again, and in the room the rapid ticking of the clock beside the bed was bringing David nearer, always nearer.

She could see her father's lined and weary face, his eyes closed, his white hair whiter than the cushion upon which it was resting. He looked so aged, so broken, so full of sorrow that she longed for strength to rise softly and comfort him, but what comfort could she carry? She thought of him as a young man, full of youth and beauty speeding over the Moor of Calder in the spring time. And afterwards the long toll of empty years spent in a childless house, in the shadowland of life. What had it all amounted to but the night creeping for ever onwards out of the future. . . .

There was a faint noise as though a hand had touched the sheet, and, turning her eyes, she saw David bending over her.

"What about some light?" he said after a while.

She trembled and replied quickly. "No—no, just like this, please—do you not like this? Besides, father is asleep over there. Could you speak very

softly, Davie, dear, he is so very tired? You won't mind, will you? It won't spoil our little time?"

He whispered something back and lifted her into his arms so that her head rested on his shoulder.

"It is a little time, just half an hour. My train was late and I must rush for the four-thirty."

"It's your last leave, Davie?"

"My last—I travel to London to-night."

"You will see your father and mother."

"Yes—to-morrow."

They sat for a moment saying nothing. In the chair the Laird moved his head a little and moaned in his sleep.

"I would have been up, Davie, only they said I must not. Perhaps I'll be downstairs when you come home again."

"Of course you will, my darling."

"And if I wasn't, Davie—if I was ill for a time would that make a difference?"

"How could it? It would be just the same."

She slipped her hand from his and stroked his belt, looking downwards. Then lifting her eyes bravely she asked again:

"Davie, I don't want to be dismal, only supposing I wasn't here at all, would you always remember me?"

He gave her a sharp quick glance, trying to pierce the deepening twilight of the room. Then smiling down upon her upturned face he bent and kissed her, replying nothing at all, at which she sighed and slipped her hand back into his.

"You're so big and strong, Davie. I wish I were big and strong. What is it you have found in me?"

He looked into her eyes and over into the heart of the flame.

"Tona, how can I tell you what you are to me? What does it matter since I love you and you love me?"

"But it does matter, Davie—very much."

"Again—some other time—when this beastly war is over."

"No—no. Now. Perhaps——"

He drew her suddenly closer, soothing her, telling her he would surely come back. At which he felt her beginning to tremble and clasped her the more in his arms, and, looking down on her, kissed her cold forehead and her lips.

"So I shall always see you now, Iona, just faintly like this, the firelight on the ceiling and your eyes—where did you get your eyes?"

"How much do you love me, Davie?"

"More than I know or can imagine. You have come to me down the centuries—like some beautiful story—only the story is mine for always. All that I know of life and love you have taught me and——"

"Yes, Davie."

"More," he said, "infinitely more. Is not that enough? Are you not satisfied?"

"It is enough," she answered solemnly. "It is enough and I am satisfied."

The little clock upon the table struck the hour of four. In the chair the old man opened his eyes, blinked a moment or two and returned to sleep.

"Iona, I must go."

"It may not be for long, Davie."

"Who knows, but there it is."

"You will always find me waiting."

He hesitated, and then after a pause:

"If I am killed, Iona?"

"I shall still be waiting, Davie—do not forget."

"How could I forget?"

He passed quickly along the corridor and down the stairs. Hamish was holding his great coat, and by the door stood John Parish and Colonel Gask. Outside the lights of the carriage were obscured by the driving snow. As he took up his cap and gloves the door of

the drawing-room opened and Miss Christina came into the hall. In the opening of that door he remembered vividly his first evening at Garroch. How long ago it seemed now. She held his hand a moment and then clipped the top button of his coat.

"Good-bye," she said quietly, "and mind you wear the socks I knitted. Warm feet are half the battle."

Miss Jean did not appear, knowing that men take ill to partings, but she waved a piece of red cotton from an upper window in the splendid hope that David would look upwards through the blinding whiteness of the night. But he never knew. The Colonel scrambled in and the carriage rolling silently over the snow went down the drive until it reached the Lodge. Mrs. MacColl and Sheila stood beside the iron gates, and when it had passed through lingered looking down the road. Hamish joined them there, and upon the three silent figures the snow fell steadily.

In Garroch the old immensity of silence was returned and with it the darkness of a winter night. Following the departure of David Miss Christina had returned to the inner hall, where she stood perfectly motionless, her head a little bent, her hands clasped behind her back, her eyes not closed as though in prayer, but wide open, searching the past, challenging the future. From far away she heard a faint bang and knew it for her sister shutting the heavy window. She started, casting a glance upwards, dreading, who knows, that Jean should catch her standing so foolishly in the empty hall. Then, lifting a skuttle of coals lying at the foot of the stairs, she went upwards to Iona's room.

On the platform the Colonel stood manfully by David's door, looking with a kind of concentrated fury at the white flanks of Calder, saying not one word, his terriers sniffing the cold air and wagging their tails dubiously from time to time. It was only when the train was in motion that he raised his familiar twisted

face, and took a grip of David's hand. His lips moved but no words came. At last he must needs release his grasp, and stand, a solitary figure, staring with mournful earnestness after the receding train. Out of the window David waved, and at that the Colonel lifted one thin arm, black against the wilderness of snow, as it were crying an eternal hail and farewell. The train rounding the curve sped rapidly away and was soon hidden in the night. It carried David into the pass of Gartleg, through which he had first seen the grey dreaming tower of Garroch, it bore him swiftly, inevitably onward, rushing into the deepening darkness, bearing him towards the south.

III

David dined alone with his father upon the following night. Afterwards he went up and said good-bye to his mother.

And suddenly Small was beside him on the pavement and he was entering a cab.

Those few hours had passed and were numbered with other kindred hours. Another stage in the journey was travelled. Looking backward he realised how greatly his father and mother had fallen short. Above all, by their attitude towards the war. That, perhaps, dominated all the rest. The house was exactly the same, the meals the same, Small the same. Upstairs his mother was lying down when he entered her room. She spoke a great deal about some bereaved acquaintance and spiritualistic intercourse. She had remarked that in a war like this it made such a difference. Otherwise she was untouched, disinterested, faintly querulous because certain toilet preparations were out of stock. And always, between her lapses into inconsequent things, she pulled up as it were with a jerk, and agitated her smooth brow, and struggled a brief moment to visualise the place where David was

going. But to Mrs. Manning the war was extraordinarily remote and uninviting. She suffered it best when she turned her mind away from the papers and from the energies of her husband, and took refuge in her little circle of earnest enquirers now exceedingly busy and intense.

After dinner his father had spoken in his eager, burning way about it all. Phrases, stray words, still haunted David's brain. "When it's all over," he recalled him saying, "the ball will be at our feet. The war after the war. We'll smash them, David—properly then. We'll build the greatest empire in the world. We've awakened—look where we're heading. Men like me are run off our legs getting things ready. We're doing our bit. . . ." The hour had indeed come when old men were seeing visions while young men dreamed dreams. He had rushed away immediately after dinner, wrung his hand, and leaped into his car. And yet beneath the noise and flood of words David thought, he was nearly sure, that once his father had faltered and nearly betrayed himself. He had said nothing, and they had parted on the doorstep under the electric lamp.

The taxi flew onwards. In the streets where the rain was glistening on the pavements, people were hurrying along intent on their several purposes, casting, it might be, a vague preoccupied glance at his kit-bag, hurrying on. He remembered meeting Charles Veriter in the club. Veriter had darted away, deeply occupied in some Government business. It was the same everywhere. Men wished him an absent good luck and were gone, immersed in the war, the ancient warfare of ambition, prestige, jobbery, conspiracy. For a week or two they had stopped dead, appalled at the flood that was sweeping over the world. They had watched it curiously. Then, with heightening confidence, they had started to dabble in it, to splash their fingers in the pools, to speak about it, to explain it, to prophecy about it, to adopt it. . . .



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The taxi slowed up. A porter flung his kit-bag upon a truck. He paid the driver and walked slowly into the station.

Upon the platform were little groups of people, white-faced, shadowy under the dim lamps. These were the ones to whom the war held no passing interest, only a vast, unfathomable horror and dismay.

David passed through the gates and approached them.

CHAPTER XXIII

JOHN PARISH SETS OUT

I

IN the dawning of spring Annie Lamont took fresh hold on life, and when the last daffodils were drooping their yellow heads beneath the midday sun she was carried out into the warm air and laid by the river bank. Beneath her, singing its ancient rune, the Clover water chattered over the shallows and slid its tenuous current between boulders long covered by winter floods.

Lying there, surveying the sweep of open country to Drumcairn, hearing only the piping of a thrush and out of the heart of the solitude the plaint of a lamb, the world seemed full of slumber and of peace, changeless, greatly bountiful. And yet within the compass of a few months, while she lay inert, poised between life and death, taking no part either in this world or the next, she too was marching out of the past into the future. Lying there, she looked out over the placid countryside and drew no peace, no heartening, from its prospect. She would have seen in it not so long ago, only the complacent benison of God, a goodly spot, a sanctuary far from the noise of cities. The habitation of a God remote from human tragedy, the kind of divine stagnation that laid no claim on human affairs, as futile as an enclosed nunnery, or a house of vague perpetual prayer—the Victorian God, soothed by maudlin hymns. To-day the world was lost to security, and facing the open sea. It had always cried out in

its agony, but now the voice was rising, not only from the obscure or oppressed, but from the very soul of humanity. It had become no longer possible to localise God.

And, looking back over her life, Annie Lamont discovered it empty and pitiful. It was not that she had been knowingly careless or insincere, and of the greater faults she had no share. But throughout it all she had followed a trim and careful path upon which no stones were strewn, no overhanging branches lashed the face. Along that way, with admirable but secure humility, she had trodden the road that might have led to the stars; keeping herself to herself; mingling with good and blameless people of her own views; reading tepid devotional pamphlets; thinking much of heaven, and seeing in it a place not unlike her drawing-room in Winter Crescent: watching life, and the zest and hardship of life, sweeping past her snug and fortified obscurity. She had discovered in these hours of pain that it is not enough to be religious, to follow out decorously and with mild satisfaction the precepts of Christ, to avoid murder and theft and adultery. It had never occurred to her that Christianity, according to Winter Crescent, was quite the most pleasant existence for unobtrusive middle-class ladies. She realised, with the anguish of a timid woman so long assured of her personal rectitude, that all her days she had never grasped the living, flaming message of Christ; had always leaned spiritually upon the Cross, rather than the Resurrection; had never thought of Him as anything but removed to an infinite distance, lost to the world, abiding in a reticence of awful tranquillity. While for the hour when she, too, should join the company of those who were risen again, she had kept a kind of self-respecting vigil these many years.

In those weary months in bed, light had broken in upon her, coming sometimes faintly, sometimes cruelly and with blinding force. She was shut off from the

world, but the spirit of its Gethsemane entered her room, and remained. Her brother, daily more tender, might, for a few minutes, carry in his voice the note of former days, but soon it would vanish away, and in his eyes, as he sat beside her, crept back a curious look that touched her because of its sorrow and, behind the sorrow, the spirit of hope. He had grown thinner, paler during those trying months, but his strength, body and soul, drove him onward, night and day. He had his set-backs, but they only stiffened him: he pinned, as it were, his flag a little nearer his base, awaiting the next advance into the enemies' country.

It was in March that she received a letter from Iona, and when she was strong enough to reply, it was too late. For, upon a spring dawn, in the first singing of the birds, Iona had looked out for the last time upon the peak of Calder, and seen through the falling darkness, its spotless crown of snow. . . .

In her letter, written so painfully, was this concluding sentence: "I shall not see Davie again until he finds me waiting for him. I am so happy, because they say I could never be well again here, and when he comes, I shall be able to help him instead of Davie always helping me."

The words had touched her deeply, but, beyond the pathos inseparable from the frail tenure of human life and human hope, there rang a resounding chord that lifted them above individual sorrow or tragedy. There was in them a ringing challenge to death that was new to her, she, who had always hovered mournfully above vaults and memorial stones. And yet, not so much a challenge, as the pledge of immortality. Surely she had faith, had always believed in the survival of the soul, but her pageantry of heaven was a cold and bloodless vision in comparison with this. For her the gift of life eternal promised no link with this present world, held out no thought of progress, or development, or sacrifice, or anything but permanent praise. Already



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she knew her life for a very poor thing and now she discovered even her love to have been sapless, confined, *submissive*. Above everything submissive. In the death of Angus her sense of resignation had reached its zenith. It was, she had consoled herself, for the best, and the grave had separated for ever the past from the present. For her, all that remained of him were little dreary possessions, little feeble memories, little quiet affections. She had never thought of him as busy in some other world. It would have seemed hard to her that Angus, who was always weakly, should not spend a million years in absolute inactivity.

These few words, written with so childlike a faith and yet with such giant courage, took so much for granted. Whether it were founded on truth or not—whether there was any hope of immortality—they breathed an assurance more profound than the wisdom of centuries. Never could she have imagined herself writing so without the support of some texts gleaned with forethought. John Parish had never spoken of Iona as religious. It was unlikely she had been strictly brought up. Then where came this certainty—was it simply pagan, or was it Christian? It was neither one nor the other, but the birthright of both. To Annie Lamont was revealed, in all its nobility and grandeur, the unquestioning demand of love, mounting on the wings of an eagle beyond the shafts of doubts and creeds, trembling hopes, and small ideals. She knew without searching further that life is like a strong wind, and love like a clear heaven of stars, and death only the hour before the dawn.

II

She had not seen her brother all day, and she must have dozed a little, for when she opened her eyes again he was standing beside her. In his hand a sheet of notepaper was unfolded.

"From Miss Christina," he said, and, stopping, looked for a long time upon the running water.

She raised her head and perceiving his unutterable sorrow, knew that for Iona and David would be no more watching, or sickness, or the deepening mystery of life. For them age would hold no weariness, nor would the years condemn; as they had lived without regret, so had they died without remorse, crying farewell before the shadows were creeping over the hill.

"Please do not speak of it, John," she said gently. "I understand—I expected it?"

"Expected it? But why not? I expected it myself. One lives from day to day—always waiting."

"It is better so, John. You remember Iona's letter?"

"How could I not? But it is hard, Annie—hard. Look at it how you will, explain it how you like—talk of heroism, sacrifice, all that—when it meets you face to face, these brave words all fall away. They are fine—but they explain nothing. They cannot satisfy us. Yet it is well with David. One's pity, one's love of David, are not without envy."

"It seems all so useless, so awful, so incomprehensible—as though God were helpless, or standing aside."

He looked at her steadily, pondering on her words. He had tried to face the problem himself. He had fought it out as best he could. As men have struggled for light during many centuries of time.

"God could never be limited," he said stumblingly, "anxious to help, unable to manifest Himself. That is the explanation of a futile mind. As though we had been let down—left in the lurch. Why should He perform a miracle—why should He wipe out man's history, man's denial of His existence, man's materialism, arrogance, atheism? What good would it serve? Where is the pride of the man who must blame God for his own ineptitude?"



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"It was not as though we had started it all."

"The sin of one man, the guilt of one nation is universal, it cannot destroy itself alone. Isn't that true? Isn't it logical? We would have God illogical, forgiving one, hating another. The earth is not His kingdom, cannot become His kingdom while we fight for supremacy in arms, in trade, sweat our own people, watch others in slavery. While we hate our neighbour, how can we turn on God if there is strife in the street? Then where is the difference in the greater world of men, in the bitterness of nations, in the tyrannies of kings? I pray to see the time when men of every language and belief will rise and proclaim that international jealousies must cease, antiquated faiths must perish, international hatreds must be healed. What is war but materialism—a vision of power? It is not the dream of the humble, but the obsession of those set in authority. That is how it appears to me. And it is always the simple, the obscure, the beautiful, who surrender their bodies, their hopes, their little kindly ambitions to build the gigantic kingdom of anti-Christ. Should God drive us headlong into the way of peace? Rather let us struggle onward until the day break."

He looked at Miss Christina's brief note with burning, sleepless eyes.

"John," she said softly, "this has hurt you, coming so soon after Iona."

"Hurt me," he reflected, "oh yes, it has hurt me. It has been like a blow—the last blow of all. And yet I feel stronger somehow, as though now the last shred of holding back had been torn away. How can I, how can any of us, ever rest until our own last hour has struck? For always we will remember those blinding farewells, the train passing away, the anxious waiting. David has played his part, given gladly. I feel as though——"

"Yes."

"As though out of the smoke and roar of battle—his battle—he had called to me to carry on with mine."

He raised his stricken eyes, nerved once more for the future.

"Peace may dawn in a year," he said earnestly, "two years, five years, but there is a war that has no truce, no sounding triumphs, no renown, but only ceaseless waging and the immortal hope. Upon the destinies of this war, do all the wars of time depend."

III

Upon a memorable occasion Dr. Archibald Dumble preached to a crowded assemblage from the text "Let thistles grow instead of wheat." John Parish could never hope to master such comfortable flights of eloquence nor to delight English visitors, but upon that Sunday evening to a half-filled church he followed the great man in one respect—he entered the pulpit without the written word. He did so for a very excellent reason—he had left his sermon, a sermon laboriously prepared, in his study desk.

It is within the virtues of a Dumble to grow rhetorical upon barley, but John Parish had no gift of pleasantry. He read very slowly the words of his text, and as slowly closed the Bible: "Wherefore seeing that we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

He stood for a moment or two nervously running the palms of his hands up and down the edges of the reading-desk, and throughout the darkened church men and women waited in an absolute silence.

All afternoon until the bell was tolling the hour of service, John Parish had wandered up the shoulder of Calder, and through the Clover Woods until he came to the tinker's hollow. The winter storms had swept

the last ashes from Colin's fire, had torn asunder the frail shelter of his sleeping-place. It was not to uphold the empire of riches or power that Colin had set forth.

Turning, he looked across the river towards Garroch, in whose empty silence the old people were facing the future with the staunch courage of their caste. There was little of life or years for them that they should be so great-hearted.

Finally his eyes rested upon the grey houses of Inverclover and he saw again Archie Saunders, "the man wi' views," to whom his country owed little enough setting out to pay the price of liberty.

All these individual, blinding memories haunted his mind. Was their pathos, their sublimity, merely personal? Assuredly greater than that. They were become ageless testimony for meaner, disheartening, querulous days, together with all the myriad kindred echoes other lives provided and would provide. They were like a pillar of fire by night. In the inevitable hour of reaction when cheap cynicism would arise to explain away the soul of the war, the permanent, undefiled, unanswerable denial would come, not from the lips of living men, but from the vast silence of the dead.

It was of such things John Parish spoke that night, and in his words was not the voice of one counselling perfection, a priest apart, but a commonplace man, groping for words, recalling his own stupidities, his own mean horizon, his own incuria, his own spiritual bondage. He was like a captain caught in a heavy gale clearing his dismantled decks, or a runner stripping his clothes to run. And when he faltered for speech and stumbled into silence, invisible to them, he saw David smiling through the darkness, and, taking courage, pressed on. . . .

He lay awake that night, and, in the first glimmering before the dawn, rose and sat by the open window. The brief summer night was speeding away; already a

dim radiance haunted the garden below. The passing of darkness had left his mind curiously calm and detached. It was as though he had snatched a brief respite for an hour of sacred peace. As though the vast hush of a sleeping world had entered his soul with the dawn.

He had come to bid farewell to Iona and David.

And, sitting there, his face pallorous in the greyness, his eyes were watching not the raging conflict of the present, nor searching the untraversed country of the future, but Iona meeting David under a sunswept heaven, in the days that were gone for ever.

The first shafts of the dawn triumphed down the flanks of the glen, the sun was climbing upwards until it flung a dazzling pathway to the summit of Ben Calder.

How was it with Iona and David?

He raised his eyes, and, at the eternal glory of the rising sun, the old wistful fancy of childhood came back to him, carrying with it a new tenderness and beauty: "Beyond the mountains—who can say what manner of country is there."

THE END

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